

Living at Richard Meier's Smith House



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ISBN paper edition: 978-84-09-31130-9

La Imprenta CG, Paterna, Valencia. Spain

Editing and Photographs by the author

Madrid, March. 2010 and June 2021

ISBN e book, 978-84-09-32302-9

Scribd/Google machine translation from Spanish. Syntactic corrections,
by the author, 2021.

This e book PDF edition, July 2021

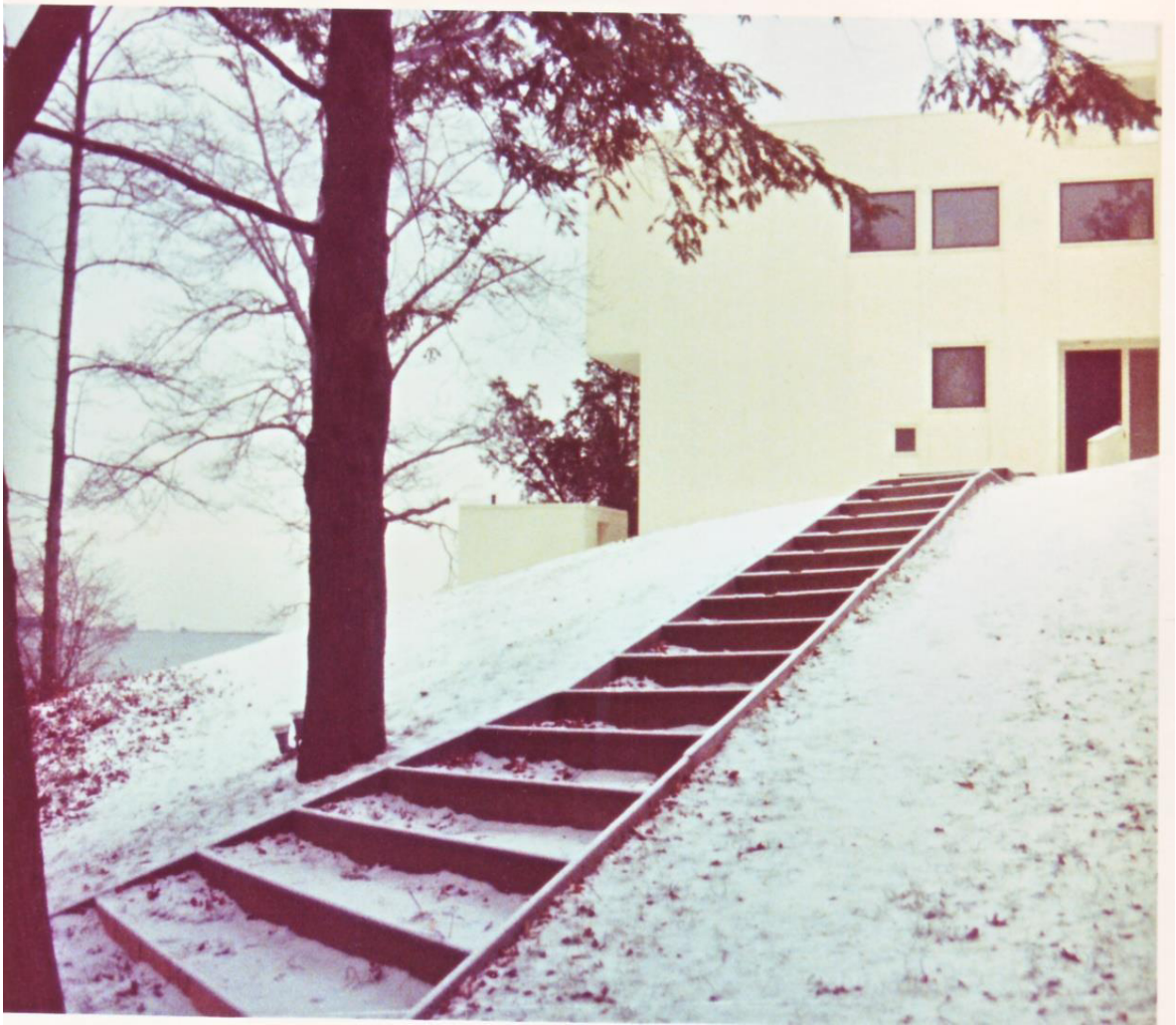
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Madrid

2010

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Access to the Smith House is located at the rear

Chapter I

It would be 8.45 in the afternoon when my phone rang in the room of the Holiday Inn of Stamford, Connecticut. I thought it might be a mistake because nobody knew where I lived other than some people from work. They wouldn't be calling at such late hour. It could not be my wife, as she would be sleeping peacefully in her Copenhagen commune. For a moment I

imagined it might be Barbara, one of the young women who served coffee at breakfast, walking professionally amongst the tables to counter the effect of cheerleader type skirts which they wore out of obligation.

It wasn't Barbara, but a much older lady to whom the company had entrusted the search of a suitable home for me. She started her assignment with enthusiasm, but after several days, her face began to show signs of resignation and displeasure. The first morning, she asked me how many children I had and when would my wife come to America, because, she said, it was important to count with their opinions. My evasive answers met with silence.

The *lady of the residences*, as I called her, worked for a real estate agency, she was quite tiny and when she sat at the wheel of her huge station wagon her head barely emerged from the depths of the car. When we passed near a house, she would ask for my attention lifting one hand. She followed a cunning order, starting with the ones she thought I was going to like less.

They were all too big. I had tried to tell her about how in Europe everything was smaller, the trees, the fruit, the roads, the streets and of course, houses and cars. Information on so far away countries was of zero interest to her.

One afternoon, returning from work, I saw a little house which I did like, and I wrote down its address for her to accompany me in a visit. She came in her car with alternative suggestions and refused to take me where I asked, without telling me why. She had fixed ideas about suitable locations, which in fact were limited to New Canaan, Wilton, Westport and Darien. Her preferences went for Wilton because that area was 'dry'; and

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had no bars, no shops, no hotels, nor anything that might disturb one's peace of mind.

She told me that Westport was the most interesting of the list. Paul Newman, she informed, lived there and so did many famous actors and actresses. "And they have a lovely country theatre" she added, as a piece of encouragement. I told her that I appreciated all that very much but that all I wanted was a *small* house, please, if it was not too much to ask for. Disgusted by so many efforts to no avail, she stopped calling just when I was about to accept anything.

The Holiday Inn was rather depressing. Built in a space between two highways it lacked any pretence of charm. Down in the parking area lay a car that I had bought, maybe too quickly, and that I no longer liked it because it was, also, too big.

In that hotel I felt like I had descended in parachute in a forgotten dream. My appearance must have reflected an abstracted and confused air that didn't pass unnoticed to Barbara when, one Sunday, I came down to breakfast later than usual. While picking up a glass of water from the table, she asked me if I wasn't feeling well. I smiled to reassure her that I was not dying and then she invited me to visit her friends.

Barbara's friends lived in a magnificent house, better than any of those shown to me by the lady from the agency. It was a white, colonial-style mansion with small and abundant windows, painted green and framed with side blinds always open.

It had been the dwelling of a famous photographer, whom I had never heard of. Inside there were lots of photographs, some hung on the walls and most archived in cabinets. In addition to Barbara, the house sheltered some ten or twelve young men and

women, carefree and condescending. They were surprised that I didn't know the photographer's name. Soon they brought before my eyes some magazine covers of "Life", signed Margaret Bourke-White, and I was offered to pick the ones I liked most, provided I would take good care of them.

I am telling these trivial things because I said earlier that I thought the phone call of that night in 1971 could come from Barbara, even if it was unlikely. Reality was different: on the other side of the line, a familiar voice spoke to me in these terms: 'Mr. Orueta, I have the possibility of offering you a rather different house, but the owners are leaving tonight, and you would have to come to see it now'.

I was in my pyjama and feeling lazy, but at hearing the word *different* I replied that in fifteen minutes she would have me waiting at the door of the hotel. It had already gotten dark when she took me through Stamford in the direction of Darien, away from the office buildings. We ceased to see highway lights and run into a forest by a narrow road. On each side there were mailboxes located at half height, but there was not a single lamppost.

When we turned a corner of the road, I noticed a sign with a small notice which read: Contentment Island. It seemed a good omen in the *winter of our discontent*. We arrived at a stone bridge, guarded by a policeman inside a car, who stopped us. She explained that we were going to the "Smith House" and the goalkeeper made a brief greeting of understanding. More darkness, more mailboxes, and more trees on the sides. Then the road suddenly ended, and the car's headlights illuminated a white wall like the screen of cinema where only a few small windows

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and a smooth and short ramp distracted the view from the overcoming whiteness.

On one side there stood a windowless construction in the shape of a cube, also very white. "It is the garage", said the lady. We were both standing and looking at the wall in the dark and started to climb the steps to the ramp, me behind her, when the wall went white again, this time illuminated by spotlights located on the ground, a sign that our presence had been noticed.

"Yes, it *is* different" said I, while we were waiting for the door to open. And I said no more. Seconds later I found myself in the middle of a stage, arms down and pupils dilated by excessive light. Around me, cylindrical and white columns were raising to hold a roof barely perceived. Outside the house, there was a rectangular chimney which only joined the glass wall to connect with the stove where some burning logs were crackling. That chimney, standing on the garden, so white, independent, and haughty, was like a monolithic character, an icon of the deities of the place, under which presence Mr. and Mrs. Smith seemed dwarfed. He had in his hand a glass of bourbon and wore navy blue blazer and flannel trousers. His wife was dressed in a grey tailored suit of the same material.

Mr. Smith's name was Frederick and Mrs. Smith's name was Carole. They told me that they were leaving for New York that night. Out of the introductions I made out that Mr. Smith had a marketing company and that she was an excellent ice ring skater.

Before showing the inside of the house, Smith played with a kind of keyboard that controlled the lights. With one finger he turned off the house completely and with another he lit the

spotlights on the outside. The luminosity of the garden entered the living room through the huge glass, and we could see each other easily. Mr. Smith encouraged me to go out to a small promontory marked by firs to each side of the house and facing the waters of Long Island Sound.

Down, on the left hand, there was a very protected cove, fully illuminated, between two rocks. Its sand was very thin, and I remember it getting inside one of my shoes. As I stood barefoot shaking the sand, I turned my head towards the house and there it was: incandescent and beautiful. You could only hear the rumour of the water in the shore. To portray the vision faithfully one should imagine the house over in a kind of pedestal, pointing to the sky as a white church organ. At the time I thought that its possession would escape my means, but that it was worth seeing the thing so closely, like someone who visits a museum or a waterfall.

After that, Mr. Smith and I went back to the house. The owners wanted to know what I was thinking, and I told them that I had not seen anything like it in my entire life. Then they asked if that meant that I approved, to which I replied raising my hands and pointing to the roof. At that moment, the lady of the dwellings woke up from her lethargy, really surprised.

We then sat on a white couch and matching seats, minus the lady who preferred a purple cushion, near the fireplace. I was told that the house had been built for them by a young architect named Richard Meier, whose name I didn't retain at the time, worried as I was about the rental. I told them that I was afraid that the housing allowance would be insufficient, although I thanked them for their kindness to receive me. I remember Mr Smit's question: 'How much has Xerox assigned to your home per

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month?'; '750' the lady was quick to answer. Fredy Smith nodded his head and told her to prepare everything and send it to his address in New York. Then he turned to his wife, in attitude of questioning, and, looking at me afterwards, he added: 'If you want, you can stay now and sleep here. I leave the keys with you and our phone in New York, in case you need us, even thou the house has no secrets.'

I breathed deep, not quite believing what was happening. I feared that suddenly there would appear somebody from the office celebrating the joke, and, worse, carrying some camera to immortalize the feat. But minutes passed and nothing like that occurred. The lady of the real estate agency asked me what time she would pick me up the next day, reminding me that I might have to go back to the Holiday Inn.

Then the Smith came down from the floor upstairs carrying a small suitcase. Before leaving, they had time to issue two Bluebeard style warnings, which they kindly presented in the form of two requests: One, most important: that nothing of the furniture and objects was to be changed. They expected me to understand that furniture was an integral part of the whole idea. I said I promised.

The second request had to do with the architect. He was just getting started and counted on being able to show the house to prospective customers. Drawings and models left too many questions that only visits to a real building could answer. I promised also to show the house with enthusiasm.

Perhaps to compensate for these restrictions, they added that, if I wanted, I could make use of the little sailboat, which that

night had remained unnoticed. I thanked them, more out of courtesy than true interest.

I went out with them to say goodbye at the door, and after a timid hand shaking, closed it, and was left alone inside. It was then I became aware of the aroma from the wooden walls, and which would welcome me from that night on, like incense from a church. It was something seductive, not too strong but impossible to ignore. No doubt it had a lot to do with wood, but also from the smell of glass and that of the furniture. Being painted all white, one might think that the house was built with hard materials; however, except for the columns, which were iron and the chimney that was brick, everything else was wood and glass.

I went down to the floor at lawn level, left the dining room to one side, noticed the fireplace repeated on the wall, and turned into the kitchen, hidden behind. It was small compared to others I had seen. Hanging on one wall there was a small frame the size of a box of cigars. It read:

SMITH HOUSE

National Architecture Prize 1968

Richard Meier

That name I was not going to forget anymore.

The fridge was empty. In the lounge bar there were drinks and snacks. I moved around looking for a bedroom. The main one was near the living room, set back to the back wall, but with the bed facing a large window in a covered space overlooking the sea. A navigator with powerful binoculars could observe the movements of the interior, especially at night.

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It took me a little time to fall sleep and I remember being awakened by a ray of sunshine which had landed on my nose. Waking up at Smith House is like coming back to life in another planet. The sense of splendid isolation owes much to the uniqueness of the site. Similar places there are many in the world; but houses like that one, in 1971, there were none.

Planes heading to Kennedy Airport were starting their downward trajectory and could be seen from the left and highest angle of the glass, they hid briefly behind the chimney and continued going down until they disappeared behind a fir. On the beach, there was a wooden jetty that was accessible by almost invisible steps. And, indeed, the little boat which, noticing me, must have suspected a long period of hibernation.

That morning, the horn of the lady's station-wagon reminded me that my toothbrush was still in the Holiday Inn, and that there was no coffee left in the kitchen. By day, the Island of Contentment was anything but gloomy, though the trees hid the forest. Only the inhabitant's surnames pasted to mailboxes slightly betrayed their intimacy.

I arrived a little late at the office. The building, which used to seem powerful and harmonious to me, now looked snuck and almost ridiculous. Back in my office, I set out to pick up the work of previous days, without achieving concentration. The image of the house in Darien infiltrated my brain. The leaves from the trees that could be seen outside the window reminded me of the place where I had slept the night before. I got up to stretch my legs and started to walk around the padded corridor. That move made my secretary rise her head: 'Everything alright Mr. Orueta?' 'You see, Thérèse, I think I am in love'. Thérèse

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frowned. And I, raising the palms of my hands towards the ceiling, finished: 'In love... with a house'.



The geese had chosen the same site

Chapter II

As every afternoon at five o'clock, the office building ran out of people. I was one of the last to come out, so that Thérèse would not notice my desire to return to the loved house. Cars left the parking lots, located in the main esplanade, on both sides of the building. I looked at my newly acquired Chevy Monte Carlo with critical eyes and headed towards the Holiday Inn, to pick up

my suitcase, which I had left consigned. Back in the car, I was trying to memorize the list of purchases: coffee, milk, eggs, bread, butter, wine, sandwiches...

When I got to the bridge of Contentment Island, it was already dark. On one side of the road, I saw again the policeman's car, brown colour, topped up with cream. The occupant came out and stopped me with a gesture. I immediately understood where the problem came from. Indeed: neither Mr. Smith nor the lady of the dwellings had made known to the watchman the unlikely event of my incorporation to the island. And the Chevy Monte Carlo didn't help much. In Tokeneke you could own any kind of car, provided it was a Volvo and better if it was the family type.

Lacking any document to prove myself as tenant, the agent (who was not a policeman, but an employee of a security company) was as hesitant as myself about how to proceed. He came up with an idea: I was to accompany him to the police station where, he said, everything would be solved. I responded to his suggestion with a counteroffer: He was to accompany me to the Smith House, where he could check several things: one) that had the house key; two) that I could talk to Mr. Smith on the phone; and three) that he was invited to a drink.

Minutes later, both cars were parked in front of the back wall of the house. The guardian and I went up the same ramp as I did the night before with the lady of the agency. Not the romantic wedding entrance I would have wanted, but I saw the scene as the confirmation of my right to live there. After making the pertinent checks, the agent did not want to accept the bourbon I offered him, nor did he seem to like the house, and he quickly returned to his place by the bridge. Relieved, I went down to the

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kitchen with my brown cardboard bag, that item which by itself defines an American movie, and I deposited it on the bar.

As priests open the door of a tabernacle, so I opened the empty refrigerator and carefully deposited the food. Then I went up to the *opera boxes*, as I called the upper floor. I named it that way it because it was only half the measure, like the mezzanine of a theatre. Towards the East it was only limited by a railing from which you could see, below, the living room, with the fireplace as the protagonist. Behind that balustrade there were three inviting bedrooms, which I began to imagine occupied by my children.

After a resigned sigh, I descended the staircase to the stage and retired to the master bedroom, where I had already rested one night. From there I went to a dressing room with large closets, between the bedroom and the bathroom. When my garments got properly hung and the symbolic possession was consummated, it was time to light that fireplace that seemed to be waiting to test the skills of the novice officiant.

There were the ashes from the night before, no need to restart. I sat for a while on the sofa, looking at the fireplace and with my eyes fixed on a sculpture with an African air that I imagined was Meier's occurrence and therefore untouchable. Eventually I began to tire of looking at that translucent idol and got up to test the keys that controlled the lighting. I tried several combinations, which from the sea must have surprised more than one bored sailor.

On the beach, indifferent to my manoeuvres, was the small boat next to the jetty, whose mere presence caused in me an annoying feeling of incompatibility. Some rowing experiments

with a docile boat in Madrid's Retiro Park was the total of my sailing credentials.

I went up the twenty-three steps and entered the house. I sat again on the white couch next to a glass table. Underneath there was a carpet in conventional oriental style and strong contrast with the rest. I placed a tray with two sandwiches and a bottle of wine just opened for the occasion and I set out to eating my first dinner at Smith House, watching quite absorbed the evolutions of the fire.

It was already five in the morning when I woke up in the sofa. The sandwiches were gone, and the bottle was half empty. In one corner of the glass table the Smiths had left a fashion magazine. Possibly it was Vogue. Before removing it from there, it occurred to me to leaf through it a bit. On the inside pages several human hangers were portraying the clothes to be preferred that year. When the hangers stopped demanding attention, I noticed in one of the photos there was a glass table and, under the glass, a carpet identical to the red carpet under my shoes. And the white columns where all over the pages.

I picked up the tray, watched the sun rise above the waters of Long Island Inlet and made a move towards the bedroom, a bedroom that was upset with me for having preferred the sofa.

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Barbara Miller with boots from an insurance company

Chapter III

Contrary to what I would have believed, the Smith House was not too much appreciated by Richard Meier's fellow countrymen. To begin with, no one knew who Richard Meier was. To follow, all of them had wife and children, several cars, some also motorcycles, dogs, pool tables, swimming pools, barbecues and so on; such accompaniments contrasted vividly with the conventual austerity of the Smith house. My visitors

couldn't imagine themselves living there and I wouldn't have recommended either.

That discovery pointed out some other differences between them and me, which the house only contributed to bring to the surface. One observation that never failed was the imagined difficulty in cleaning the huge crystals; another: that there was no possibility of intimacy, everything being so open and transparent. To the first criticism I responded that the crystals remained always perfect while I did nothing to clean them after rain or snow. To the second, I mentioned that in the Nordic countries of Europe, privacy was less important than sunlight.

The lack of enthusiasm about Meier's house used to be balanced with expressions of admiration for the environment and the panoramic view without. The bliss of the beach gave rise to a comment of mine on how the notion of waterfront properties was something that Spaniards knew it existed in other countries, like divorce and polygamy, but that in Spain were illegal. This impertinent observation was like saying to a sultan that he should have enough with just one woman.

Not everyone who came was insensitive to the aesthetics of the Smith House. Don (Donald) and Joyce Pendery, Bob and Lynn James, Michael Kaufmann, John and Wendy Duerden, and even Elmer and Susan Humes, all of them recognized the beauty in its lines. In return, I tried to praise their homes, but obfuscated by the Smith House, they seemed to me devoid of soul. Yet, I remember favourably that of Jack and Liz Thomas, a friendly British couple, who had rented a beautiful residence in Westport, belonging to Bette Davis.

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Westport was the ideal locality for those Jews who preferred not to live in New York but wouldn't want to move too far. Among my Jewish friends, the nearest at the time was Michael Kaufmann, though he had me somewhat clueless when it came to know what he really thought on any subject.

Barbara was also Jewish. Before she came to see the Smith House, I wondered what her reaction would be like. One afternoon, after five o'clock, I went to the house of the photographer Margaret Bourke-White carrying with me the copy from Vogue magazine. The 'outlaws', as I called the friends of Barbara, thought highly about my description of the Smith House so I invited them to a rapid visit. I don't know what strange arrangements they had between them, but finally the only one who came was Barbara, always smiling and enthusiastic enough to admire the great toy, which is how she defined the house. She did not leave one corner without inspection and comments. 'Why don't you hang the pictures of Margaret?' she asked me, seeing so much white wall available. I did not want to let her know the promise I had made not to change anything, for fear of deteriorating her opinion of me so early. So, I excused myself by claiming that I still had not received the frames.

With her nose almost stuck against one of the front windows, Barbara noticed the presence of the sailboat. The vision prompted her to tell me that next time she would want to go sailing to the other shore of the coast to visit an aunt of hers who lived in Long Island. I replied that she could count on it.

Barbara handled her life without hesitation. Everything seemed to be alright. Everything but insurance companies. There was no little corner in her heart that took pity on them. 'I'm going to change cars' -she once told me- 'because this one has too many

faults' She asked me to accompany her with mine, to deliver the old one. We entered an area more wooded than usual, she stopped her car and left it lying on the shoulder. I didn't want to ask her what had happened to it; she got into mine and we returned to the outlaws' house in New Canaan.

There, we were gathered to go out and buy some shoes. I tried to escape from the invitation, but I was introduced almost by force in one of their caravans, wherein reigned a greater than usual joy. After a few minutes, the thing parked in the square of a spacious commercial centre (gigantic) where only see shoes and people buying shoes could be seen.

They weren't very interesting because, to my mind and in those days, people of Fairfield County saw in shoes only a very useful instrument to protect their feet from the elements and the chafing of the ground. Yet they must have seemed worthy of study to the outlaws since they devoted a lot of time to try several pairs and contrast comforting opinions. Then they left without paying before the benevolent gaze of the cashiers. It turned out that the insurance company would reimburse the centre up to that year's provision for thefts. Barbara asked them to wait for me. In a hurry, I took the nearest set: a pair of blue cowboy boots.

On another end from the range of people who visited my house, the names of Don and Joyce Pendery, his wife, stand out. She was professor of History. Don always seemed to me to be the more cultured and the most intelligent director (and least listened to) amongst those around Archibald, the chief executive officer of the Company. It should be added that eventually Don was to be my boss.

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It is a quality often noticed, the care with which the bosses of big American companies treat their dependants. They remember the names of wives and children, congratulate them on family occasions and are interested in their problems in a way that in Europe we imitate poorly, and not always with enough conviction. Don was an excellent example. He came from IBM, like several other hirings that were the best recognition of admitted superiority over Xerox. Don tried to correct a tendency of my thinking to leave the conclusions for the end, as judges do. He warned me that corporate dialogue was governed by the rules of the journalism. First the headlines, and only if the headlines deserved attention, there could follow the full detail on the subject. I tried to counter his remark by pointing at the difference between information and persuasion. And set, as an example my experience in Rank Xerox claiming that Luis González Camino and I were practically kidnapped and put in a plane from Madrid to London, to make our case for the ridiculousness of the objectives that the Company had assigned to Spain, while adding the fact that, *mutatis mutandis*, the reasoning applied to all the countries, not excluding Great Britain. We spoke to the Board for almost two hours, we answered many questions and the elderly President Thomas Law congratulated us at the end.

Immediately, and as a result, Luis G.C. became a kind of European duke of Alba, who terrorized his hosts in the relentless pursuit of the set objectives. And in consequence also, I was destined as Controller Pricing in London. To this childish talk of mine, Don replied that without a simple, interesting, and short message from the president of the Spanish company, no one would have listened to us.

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I was invited to his house several times. The Pendery couple knew Europe well and had a special interest in Italy, and within Italy, they exulted in Florence. Sometimes, over the years, it has occurred to me that Humanity could be divided into two groups: those who think that Florence is the best place in the world, and those to whom the joy of Florence passes unnoticed.

Don and Joyce had known me under different circumstances in London and, so, when the time came to say goodbye, they assured me that the Smith house would please my children, when they came. "Surely" I said. They smiled sympathetically and we shook hands at the doorsteps.

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The temptation to go sailing became irresistible

Chapter IV

It wasn't the fear of a second suggestion to cross the waters of Long Island Sound to visit Barbara's aunt, nor the disrespectful wobble of the small sailboat. These reasons contributed to the decision but were not the main cause. It was the desire to see the house from the sea which moved me to choose a Sunday afternoon, when the waters were calm and ran a light breeze, as time to try my first outing on board of the boat.

One of the few times I used the garage, I had noticed a thin tube that was forgotten in a corner, like the harp of Bécquer, and surrounded by a kind of plastic cover, which could very well be a sail. Nearby, also against the wall, you could see a small boat engine which weighed more than it appeared at first glance.

The morning of that day I had gone down to inspect the sailboat and I could see that, in what one might call his navel, it had a fitting which could receive the garage tube and the enrolled sail. I also noticed that at the stern you could easily hang the little engine; so, everything was ready for the experiment.

A small sailboat, like a bicycle, offers a deceptive appearance of simplicity and innocence for those who think it is possible to use them for the first time without facing two or three shocks, at least. Regardless of this consideration, I busied myself moving from the garage to the beach several times, preparing for the event. The things from the garage had to be collected by the jetty. As I inserted the tube into its receptacle, it became the mast of the ship. From its top hung two wires as tousled locks, which were promptly fixed on both sides. Then it was the turn of the engine, which I placed at the stern, without difficulty and with my feet already in the water.

Sitting on the bench of the boat, I wondered whether the time had come to break loose, or better think twice about it. I noticed that if I leaned to the right the mast leaned to the right and that if I leaned to the left the mast leaned to the left. Encouraged by the docility of the mount, I released the ties that joined us to land, and tried unwinding the sail completely, which happened without my help, leaving a visible line at one end. The little wind pushed the sail aside, the line fell into the water, and it cost me some display of skill to recover it. Once I had it in my

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right hand, having the tiller in the other, the boat began to separate from the jetty. I felt something like the first time I rode on a donkey, especially when checking that if you moved the tiller to the left the boat went to the right; and vice versa. It didn't seem reasonable, and I took it as a rude reaction of the sailboat. Another curious habit was that the sail behaved the opposite as it would have been expected. If you pulled it, to slow down the mount, its reaction was to go faster and if you gave loose to the rein, it simply wouldn't move. Anyway: it was good to know and remember. Vessel and crew, closely together, managed to get away from the beach about two hundred meters, moment when I set out to turn my head to see, finally, the Smith House from the sea.

There she was, a little smaller, and indifferent to our manoeuvres. When leaving the area which was more protected from the wind, the ship suddenly rolled over and lay down floating. It was like the time I got thrown out to the ground by a horse in Segovia, for no reason. The worst wasn't the awkward sensation produced by cold water; that was important, but, more than that, was the fact that the small engine had disappeared.

I swam back to the beach to ponder, in dry condition, possible ways to secure the boat. My first idea was to go buy an anchor so that it would not go any further. This idea contained the problem of not knowing where to find an anchor shop. It seemed to me easier to buy a long rope and swim holding it to the boat. If one rope were not large enough, I would buy two and tie them up.

That's what I did. I drove out with the car to Ridgeway Centre and found what I wanted. It took me half an hour to get back to the house, hoping the boat had not 'gone with the wind'.

When I got to the top of step which leads down to the beach, I saw that the boat was quietly resting in the jetty. Next to her, shone the chrome of a boat that evidently was from the Police. Two officers were already stepping on the sand and when they saw me upstairs, they moved their hands waving. We exchanged polite words, and since then my territorial waters were the subject of assiduous vigilance, which gave me diverging feelings: of security on the one hand, and of being victim of meddling on the other. Nevertheless, on the day of the shipwreck the capital thought was that the little ship had been saved and that the attitude of her salvagers could not have been more polite and attentive. I was already learning that at sea nobody snubs other people mistakes.

That afternoon, however, my thoughts followed other avenues. Despite having come out relatively well, I felt submerged in a state of melancholy that could not be attributed solely to the realization that I had to buy another engine. What was happening to me was that an illusion, an incipient and tiny illusion, had vanished. A door, small but open to a vast space, had suddenly closed. The Smith House look diminished, as if shrunk, and the flight of the geese almost irritated me. I went downstairs to collect the ship's rigging; I disassembled the mast and rolled up the sail, tying it carefully with the line, which came out in the shape of a mouse's tail. Everything had to go back to the garage.

Then I stopped to think a bit about the garage. From the beginning my attitude towards the garage had been quite inconsiderate. Most times, I would leave the car outside, without bothering to make use of the protected space. That garage couldn't have a good opinion of me, because I didn't have a good

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opinion of it. Being so detached from the house and so lacking in grace, I attributed its existence to an untimely request from its owners, possibly Carole. At the Smith House it played an expendable role, an after-thought that assimilated him to an adopted entity, in whose veins did not run the same blood as that of its parents.

That day, I noticed that he had lost his sulky air and that my unsuccessful navigation and subsequent shipwreck made him crack with laughter. With mast and sail under my arms, I stopped for a moment in front of the door. 'You are not ugly' I told him. 'I apologize for not using your services a little more often' I added.

Light came in from the outside through the raised gate. Nevertheless, I lit the indoor lamps to better see inside. I looked at the coin where the mast had been and put it back in the same position. When I was about to leave, something caught my attention greatly. Something that was leaning against another wall, something that was shaped like a wing or fin, the size of a large dog, but quite smooth and sharp. All of which would not have been of much interest under normal circumstances, had it not been for its colour. It had the same, identical, unmistakable red colour of the ship. It was a keel.

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The Smith House at sunrise

Chapter V

The Smith home was one of the first to be built by Richard Meier. It is from 1969. I lived in it in 1971 and part of 1972. I was 36 years old, two years younger than Richard Meier. The beginnings of Meier's career as an architect were not easy. In the absence of clients, he began by building a house for his parents. After finishing his studies, he went to Europe and was impressed by the art of Le Corbusier, Alvar Alto and Walter Gropius. If the

European influence on Meier's work were to be summarized in a specific building, I would choose the house that Le Corbusier presented in the architectural competition that was held in Stuttgart in 1929. But, as some say, plagiarism is forgiven when the robbery is followed by murder, and the Smith House develops that branch of Le Corbusier tree beyond the Swiss architect's intention.

When Meier returned from his trip, he established his architectural firm in New York, with the illusion, selfishness (and naivety) of great creators. His first clients were friends who condescended to his wishes and let him build low budget summer homes. Still, after putting a lot of enthusiasm into the projects, it could happen that the client backed down and the model remained an object, that could be mistaken for a sculpture.

And as the word 'sculpture' comes to mind, it is inevitable to comment on its connection with the art of Richard Meier. Those of us who have lived in some of their houses, when asked what it feels like, we tend to agree in describing the feeling as that of *living inside a sculpture*, though without traces of claustrophobia. On the contrary, the word 'sculpture' is to be understood here as an artistic way of limiting the matter of form in such manner that its vision from any angle and under any light, produces a pleasant and ennobling experience, regardless of the practical use that the object might have. In this context, Richard Meier's houses would remain beautiful, even if they weren't houses.

Richard Meier was then an architect-sculptor. I attended an exhibition of his sculptures in New York that year of 1971. They were not those dark metal skeins in the shape of scourers that would come later. The ones I saw in New York resembled his

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homes reduced to the bare minimum, so one could say they were like seeds.

With a less literary and somewhat more technical language, some scholars speak of the 'utilization of light' as a primordial factor in Meier's architecture. Every corner, every wall, each angle, emits different signals of light or shadow, in response to the light coming from the sun or from the moon. According to this interpretation, it is the light and not the landscape, which gives that special quality to the constructions.

The uniqueness of the houses of Richard Meier often met with resistance for environmental reasons. Whiteness offended some defenders of Nature, but 'whiteness' was not the only problem. The smooth ceilings and large glazed spaces collided with the mentality of most suburban homeowners.

The Smiths had expected to be offered a single floor design, as do most buyers of 'contemporary' homes, but Richard Meier found an excuse to propose one with three levels, telling them that, the grounds being rocky, they would save a lot of money by reducing the foundation space. The Smiths' home, being in a 'cul de sac' of Contentment Island was able to escape local scrutiny. Somehow, the *Spirit of contradiction* had found shelter in whiteness and in Meier verticality.

Sculptors tend to make vertical works, perhaps following a vital instinct, if we accept that horizontality is related to sleep or death. Meier's first houses looked upwards. Afterwards, the limitations from the desires of his customers made him renounce to that aspiration and his houses were scattered in the space.

The first houses make up a small group of five: the Smith House, the Hoffman House, the Saltzman House, the Douglas

House and the Shamberg House. The best of all is, of course, the Smith House, but the other four are graceful sisters and are entitled to a bit of comment.

Starting with the Hoffman House, I would call it 'Euclid House' or 'Apotheosis of the Traingle'. Anita and David Hoffman were brave in preferring Meier's to an alternative prefabricated home they had in mind for a small plot in East Hampton, New York. Within a few months, Richard Meier accomplished his promise. The result is a creativity exercise based on angles of the three possible forms: acute, straight, and obtuse. The texture of the house is identical to that of the Smith's: white, and wood, but glazed spaces are less abundant, and the marine spirit is absent. The Hoffman had young children and anything that could pose a danger of fall was to be avoided. Today this house has lost part of its original elegance. Someone, not Richard Meier, has covered the once white walls white grey plates.

I now turn to the Saltzman House. Here the central design is continued by a sort of amoeba, attached to the nucleus by a long passageway. It is the beginning of horizontality. The reason was simple: the Saltzman were grandparents. To reconcile the pleasant visits of children and grandchildren with the peace and quiet needed at that age, Meier devised this kind of shelter as a safeguard for the joys of children, so lovely, provided the retain the quality of contingency. The Saltzman House is distinguished by incorporating large, curved surfaces in its design, reminiscent of the villa Savoye by Le Corbusier. The chimney is located inside. And the marine atmosphere, so typical, is perceptible.

The sister that better recalls the Smith House is the Douglas House. The Douglas had seen the Smith House and they wanted

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to have one the same. Understandably, Meier did not want to repeat. The place where it had to be built was an urban development in Grand Rapids, a city surrounded by Lake Michigan. They already had purchased the plot and all that remained was for the association of property owners to approve the project. But the approval was denied. James Douglas managed to recover a part of the money invested and bought a small piece of forest land with lake views. It seemed impossible to build anything there, so inclined was the slope, but the difficulty acted as a spur to the inspiration of Meier who produced a second masterpiece.

The Douglas House is like a Smith House that were to come down in the form of a waterfall into the waters of Lake Michigan. It is a vertical construction, which is accessed at the highest floor. The emotion increases as one goes down to lower floors in an atmosphere that the Douglas recognized as that of the Smith House. The same elements, the same cylindrical columns and large glazed windows, the landscape getting inside the house, all greenery, the blue of the water opposite, the changing light, the stairs inspired by the deck of ocean liners...nothing was missing.

Now, for the Shamborg House. She is a younger sister of the Smith House. It is the smallest and they have in common the access to the interior at halfway height. It lacks a chimney, but nautical elements abound, despite that there is no water in sight. An earlier ungracious building is attached, dark, and further obscured by the whiteness so near.

A common vicissitude of Meier's houses is that at some point time they have been neglected by their owners. The paint that covered the brick of the chimney of the Smith House began to crack, exposing the inside and breaking the illusion of unity

with the rest of the construction. The Douglas Home was totally abandoned several years until a new owner decided to restore it to its ancient splendour.

To the damages of the passage of time, the calamity of retrofits is added, more difficult to mend. With age, the Smith House has developed adipose formations which, despite having been initialled by Richard Meier, they only prove the architect's friendship with their former benefactors.

As for the Old Westbury and the Aekberg houses, they represent the point of departure to another type of customer: that of large multinationals or the municipalities of major metropolises such as Milan, Florence, Barcelona, Frankfurt, Berlin, and New York.

The firm Meier and Partners continued to accept orders for private clients, but the simplicity of the initial era was evolving and adapting to novel tastes. The white colour ceased to be omnipresent, the glazed areas were divided into smaller rectangles; aluminium and steel made their appearance, as did exotic woods.

Currently, Richard Meier is almost eighty years old and deserves not be bothered and enjoy honours and pleasant occupations. He, better than anyone, can discuss in talks and conferences the ins and outs of harmonization between *the beautiful* and *the useful*.

I have left for the end of this chapter the story of the Maidman House because I think it is an extreme case of the eternal conflict between author and client. In 1970, the Maidman saw from the sea the Smith House and they were captivated by it. The couple owned a house in Sand Points, another place on the

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Long Island coast, closer to New York. They showed up at Richard Meier's offices. Meier came to see the site. It was almost ideal, but he found the Maidman house hideous. Talking to the owners, he implied that the current residence would have to be eliminated to erect the new one: a magnificent advertisement for the architect's youthful studio, because it would stand very visible, so close to Manhattan.

Everything seemed to be going well until Dagny, the little daughter, found out. We adults tend to underestimate the affection that children have for things and animals. Dagny would not stop crying. The Maidman asked Meier to agree to build the new house without tearing down the old one, but the architect was unwilling to leave standing what he considered an eyesore, all said, of course, with good words.

When they had resigned themselves to continue living as before, they received a call from Meier who assured his friends that he would do the new house without getting rid of the old one and... in the same place! The proposal greatly intrigued the Maidman. How could that be done? Meier explained: the new house would be like a wedding dress that would cover the body of the old bride. Would Dagny accept? Dagny accepted.

From that point, the white walls were rising, momentarily windowless. Internal surgery operations were transforming the spaces to everyone's delight. From the outside the walls were adopting a harmonic movement of pictorial connotations. The old furniture was moved to other houses or sold. Meier personally took care of the decoration. When the interior was finished, Meier introduced a slide: Dagny's slide. It is both a playful object and an emergency exit.

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I can imagine the scene in 1972 of Maier and the Maidman family falling, with laughter and fear, down Dagny's slide at the inauguration of the reborn house.

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Red was the colour of the Smith House mailbox

Chapter VI

When I remember my arrival to the Smith House, I recall the scantiness of my luggage. No books, no records, no rackets, no musical instruments, no radios, no televisions, no camera, no hats, no wallet of documents, no skis, no golf clubs nor running shoes. Just a minute: I had the blue cowboy boots, the pictures by Margaret Bourke-White and a record I took home from New Canaan (with permission of the outlaws) which I used to play all the time. It was the 3rd symphony of Joachim Raff, the one with

the forest title of *Im Walde*, soon paired with his fourth *Leonora*, my musical discoveries in America. Not at all convinced, Barbara considered this repertoire of two too restricted and recommended adding: Chicago, Santana, Carole King, Emmy Lou Harris, Carly Simon, Aretha Franklin, and others I don't remember.

None of that music reminded me of the distant Europe, but some songs came much to purpose in the low hours. There were days when I spent minutes looking through the glass as the mist hid the waters of Long Island Sound and Carole King and her piano talked about “too much rain falling”. *‘If anyone asks you how I am, just say I’m doing fine, ‘cause I’m doing the best I can’*.

There came a time when the oracle told me it had had enough of ballads and suggested spacing the sentimental purr. Only an exception to its censorship was granted: it was a gift album from my friend Marjorie, whom I will introduce you to, shortly. The record contained Israeli songs which turned out to be appreciated by the house, may be on behalf of Meier's ancestors. The person who sang them was Iva Zanicchi. One of the songs ended up saying *‘Non scordarti di me’* and *that one* was prohibited, but the rest of the album, written Shalom, had no problem.

One object I was quick to acquire was a photo camera. It was a Kodak Pocket Instamatic the size of a tablet of soap somewhat elongated and to be loaded with dwarf cartridges. With that camera I made the photos that appear in these pages. They were to be sent to the mother of my children, along with three airline tickets. In the end, I only sent one, that of the geese, and the three tickets Copenhagen New York, which I threw to the

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mail like someone throwing a bottle into the sea with a message inside. The message said, 'The geese and I welcome you here'.

Along with the tickets, the memories of the last days at Wimbledon returned to my mind. Lene's refusal to move to the United States. The empty house at Lake Road. My car rides coming back from Euston Road headquarters. Every day I had to cross twice a bridge in the Fulham district. One afternoon, as I drove near, I noticed on the left sidewalk a young woman with a long skirt - like Lene used to wear - who made the auto stop signal. Her appearance resembled the gypsy Esmeralda of *Notre Dame de Paris*. That outfit brought back bad memories, and maybe that's why I stopped and saw her sit on the back seat of the car. She also lived in a commune. As I was quite fed up with everything, I asked her if I could be admitted. That made her laugh and wanted to know the reasons. When she found out more about me, she said no. A little later she got a little closer to the front seat and clarified that it was better for the children to go to the States. 'You are probably right' I said to her.

When we were nearing her commune, I asked if she wanted to see how I lived. She took a few seconds before responding: 'I'll do something better. I give you this book'.

As the author was Russian, the novel was set in Russia. Esmeralda must have thought that I gave the profile of the protagonist. It started with him wanting to kill himself, jumping into the Volga. Some minutes before consummating his decision, he had observed a sign on a house announcing the services of a sorcerer or magician, for troubled souls. The suicidal person told the sorcerer the reasons why he was determined to stop living, which certainly were not few, and lamented to have made the worst possible decision every time life had offered him several

options at different crossroads. One of the first chapters ends with the magician making the necessary witchcraft so that the suicide can have a second chance, reborn, but knowing the consequences of each decision before taking them. In the last chapter, the suicidal guy wants to kill himself again because he has repeated the same bad decisions, this time with new arguments. Apparently, the wrong decision was not the first, but the second, and when the time comes for the second, it was not the second but the third, and so on.

Anyway, I liked the book, but it didn't convince me. Perhaps it made me more aware that freedom of movement is something that all creatures share, although the snail and the crab have limitations different from those of humans, and these to those of birds. Within which limitations, everyone should go wherever he pleases.

Besides, there was the question of chance. Chance as liberation from destiny. Ouspensky's novel seemed to me too deterministic. Instead, I thought, the consequences of trivial decisions taken, not by us, but by persons who couldn't possibly suspect the impact of a small act in the lives of others, was something that I had experienced in life like some sort of game.

Sitting in front of the small, round, pedestal table and looking over to the beach, I told myself that I would not be there, in that house, and in that chair, had it not been for the fascination that a Belgian gentleman felt by the tasty barnacles of Galicia.

This rather important person lived in La Hulpe, a privileged place in the world, not far from Brussels, and was a gourmet of rare obstinacy. Every year he travelled with his wife and two daughters to eat these special barnacles and order that they be

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sent by plane in the months in which they necessarily had to live in their country. The origin of Mr. Neukens' passion dated back to the year 1950, when the 'Mercedes' automobile in which they were travelling met, face to face, with a truck in the middle of a narrow bridge. The Belgian gentleman believed that the truck driver would agree to rear back and let him pass, but the driver did not. They both got off to discuss the issue and the argument ended with the lorry driver's invitation to the four Belgians to taste the succulence of the strange beings that inhabit the furthestmost rocks amongst Finisterre's shaking sea waves.

Back at his Belgian home, Neukens felt he had failed to reciprocate the truck driver's kindness. As a form of compensation, he was looking for Spaniards, any Spaniard, to entertain them. One of his 'victims' was a student of the faculty of Law, who, when he returned to Spain, overwhelmed by the hospitality of the family in La Hulpe, suffered the same feeling of guilt without guilt.

In 1953 three friends, two and I, were at a table of the faculty cafeteria planning a trip to Denmark, to breathe some Nordic air. The student of La Hulpe, who had heard our conversation with great interest at an adjoining table, came to tell us about his adventure with the Neukens family and he asked us, please, to bring to them an enormous cheese from La Mancha on his behalf. The trip was written down for posterity in the diary of one of the three, who was not me. Everything is told there, but suffice to say that, before leaving Belgium, the Neukens gave us some addresses in Denmark. One of the daughters, Claire, had exchanged stays with a Danish family and offered to write to them announcing our visit. That's how we met the Gram's. And Lene.

After a year, in the same Faculty of Law, an almost unknown colleague approached me with a curious offer. He had obtained a scholarship at the University of Copenhagen under the exchange system between universities. The Dane was already in Spain, but at the last moment, the Spaniard's parents refused to let him live for nine months in such an un-Catholic country. As he did not want to upset the Spanish Foreign Affairs, he proposed that I appear at the Ministry offices desperately asking for a scholarship to Denmark. He was sure, he said, that they would grant it to me at once on condition that I leave Spain immediately.

So, to make my point about chance versus destiny: two unrelated elements: barnacles on the one hand, and religious fanaticism on the other, were responsible for the Nordic half of my life.



The Chevy Monte Carlo crossing the bridge of Contentment Island

Chapter VII

I had been scheming for several days the impending sacrifice of the Chevy Monte Carlo for the sake of a better adaptation to the tastes of my unknown neighbours of Contentment Island, when a wonderful event came to his aid, and ensured its permanence in my company.

The resistance that the sea had opposed to my attempts to be welcomed, made me turn my face to land, settling for more familiar and friendly spaces. Steeped in the purpose of appreciating what is at hand instead of chasing the elusive, I asked my car to take me wherever it wanted, so long as it wasn't the office, because it was Saturday.

Fairfield County is a forest, and the roads are like walks inside a park. In autumn, the trees look like paintings by a beginner in which he had used all the tubes of his box. In winter, the leaves abandon the branches, and the area only regains its lost beauty when it snows. Then, the colour white substitutes or represents all others, as Meier would have said. Sometimes it snows too much, branches break, older trees fall, and the power goes off. Everyone must remove the snow from their plot, something that turns out to be more painful than it might seem at first sight.

The car followed its instinct and drove me inland, crossing forests and two highways, with so much dedication that it began to worry me. After half an hour we stopped seeing trees and we entered a more civilized region of meadows and elms, which reminded me of the English landscape. The road became narrower, we had got lost and it was time to return. But we had three cars in front of us and there was no way we could overtake them. In more open fields, they began to circulate slowly. Their caution intrigued me. One after the other were turning to the left, leaving out of the main road in a semi-hidden deviation. At the corner, a T-shaped board announced Caramoor.

I assumed it was a rural restaurant and followed the track of the last of the preceding cars. We arrived at a beautiful meadow, the size of a square, and all three cars lined up and

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stopped their engines. In the background, an imposing Florentine style arcade emerged against the blue of the sky with no other apparent utility than to attract attention.

As soon as I got out of the car, at the other end of my visual horizon appeared, surrounded by trees, a Roman villa, which could also have been taken for a Spanish convent. Being so out of its natural environment, that severe mole, with its red tiles and Mediterranean stones, produced a sense of unreality.

The occupants of the cars headed to the entrance of the building, and I took the occasion to pretend that I came with them. A large wrought iron door was the first obstacle. To each side there were two small buildings, joined by a central arch, with lateral gates doors. I tried to pass but someone stopped me with a determined, polite, and almost obsequious gesture. That someone was an Englishman who liked to look like it: foulard of silk around the neck, suede jacket, shiny big shoes, handkerchief in the jacket pocket. He made me go to the office next to the door, offered me a seat and sat behind a table. 'I am assuming you want to become a sponsor?' were his words. A sheet of paper, as a diploma, made me member of Caramoor (25 \$ a year), which had just been open to the Public.

From the large entrance, the first thing you could see was a courtyard with the appearance of a cloister; columns and corridors in its four sides. It was the 'Spanish Courtyard', where the chamber concerts would take place. In one corner, a grand piano was awaiting its turn, sheathed for protection. Around this courtyard were various rooms and main halls. Each of them was a museum by itself, with furniture, pictures, fabrics, watches, and curtains brought from Italy, France, or Spain, in accordance with the spirit of the mansion, which was strongly southern. The

Chinese exception, which some might judge discordant, was no different than the *coins chinoises* of European palaces.

The dining room was composed of a long wooden table with endless chairs and over them a coffered ceiling. At both ends of the table there were two armchairs with legs one inch taller than the rest, following a European custom of the time, to give a plus of visibility to the hosts. The whole set came from a palace in Toledo, Spain.

One of the bedrooms kept a bed where Napoleon was said to have spent the night. Another room, imported in its entirety, apparently had belonged to Pope Boniface VIII. Elegant doors were attributed to the home of the Capuletti, in Verona. Everything was like that, a bit surreal, not in a pejorative sense, but meaning dreamy.

In a corner of the music room there was a curious artifact, like an old radio. My host explained that it was a musical instrument, named *Teremin*. All you had to do was to stand in front of it and move your hands like conductors do, and the teremin would answer (provided it was plugged in) with musical sounds, like those of the cello, each note corresponding to each gesture. It had been invented by a Russian, with a complex and errant life. His name was Leon Termen, expert in electronics, and had married three wives, one in America. When the Second World War broke out, the Russians kidnapped and kept him under house arrest, to invent anything he could think of... One day he asked a sculptor to make a wood carving with the eagle and the shield of the United States. The object was placed in the American embassy as a gift from Russia to a friendly country. For years it was broadcasting conversations to the Russians.

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Finally, the Americans found out and made a movie with details of the intriguing story.

Termen had conquered favour with the Rosen, who protected him with moral support and money. The teremin was there because the late lady of the house had distinguished herself as a concert player of this instrument in important cities. She even had had sympathetic composers write music scores.

Her name was Lucia Bilgelow before she married Walter Rosen, and they had two children: Walter and Ann. The Rosen lost their son Walter in World War II. Ann was the only heir and could be seen in Caramoor, busy bringing her parents Foundation to life.

Her father, the patriarch, was a German immigrant, who arrived in New York in the 1920s and became known as a lawyer in a real estate law firm. From there he went on to work in a bank and become a rich banker. He accumulated more than he could keep in the house of New York. In need of space, he turned to a former partner to find him a residential bargain as large as possible and not far away. The search ended in Katohna. Walter went to see the property, whose owner was married to Caroline Moore. The name Caramoor comes from hers.

Walter did not like the buildings, but he found the farm excellent, with beautiful trees and bright. He would tear down the houses and build in its place the villa of his dreams, a mansion like some of the ones he had admired in Italy.

After the crisis of 29, Walter began to look at those walls with more forgiving eyes. The Caramoor villa was saved from demolition. Florentine dreams bore fruit in an open-air opera

house containing the arches I had noticed without guessing their purpose.

Lucia used to invite musicians to Caramoor, together with music-loving friends, who enjoyed not only the music but also the hospitality of the Rosen. Among them were some eminent artists, such as Artur Schnabel and Bruno Walter (I was able to verify this statement in successive visits, sitting next to a gentleman in a white jacket, who listened to Alicia de Larrocha play the piano and whose face belonged to Leonard Bernstein). Instead of having to pay for a night in Manhattan, they were picked up by the Foundation, or Anna Rosen herself, and up they went to Katonah, where they were treated like princes or princesses, dining, sleeping in any of the eight rooms and having breakfast, delighted with Caramoor. Sometimes they paid back with a concert for people like me.

As I listened to the explanations of the Englishman, an interesting aroma was coming from the kitchens. I thought I knew enough about Caramoor and we returned to the front door.

Back on Contentment Island, I refrained from commenting these admirable events with my car, but once we got to Tokeneke, I put it in the garage and patting him on the back, I told him not to worry anymore.

Before going to bed, I entertained myself thinking about Caramoor. The *Spirit of Contradiction* hovered over the top of the Smith House, which was the antithesis of Caramoor. Were Meier and Rosen this opposite? Rosen died before Meier built anything, but it is easy to guess that the house of his dreams, the one he never built, would not have been entrusted to Meier, not even for free.

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Rosen, like Goethe, dreamed of '*that country where the lemon tree flourishes*', and Meier, also like Goethe, would ask for *light... more light!*

And I understood them both, as incapable of deciding as Buridan's donkey.

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Photo composition from the Balconies

Chapter VIII

When I said I had nothing of mine, but suits and shoes, I forgot that I did have a slide rule and a book. The slide rule was cylindrical, constructed in the form of telescope, and had been given to me in London by an old gentleman of Rank Xerox, whose name was Ballard. It was a rare object, and few had seen it

before. It had the advantage over any conventional slide rule that the marks were coiled in a spiral on each section of the cylinder, a trick that made the rule ten times longer, giving it greater precision. In 1971 pocket calculators were inexistent. To add and subtract I had a kind of metal box that was driven with a spike somewhat larger than a toothpick. Why did I need the rule and the adder? Better to tell the story from the beginning, with its dose of serendipity.

Back in the thirties, there lived in New York a son of Swedish emigrants, named Chester Carlson, who had managed to work in a patent office, despite not having any training for the job. He lived in financial straits and noticed what went on in the office and how some became rich with their inventions. He knew physics, but the company valued more any knowledge of Law, so he decided to join the University and achieved the bachelor's degree in 1936.

Tradition has it that one day, Chet (so his wife called him) was intrigued by something that had happened in his kitchen. While cleaning, Chet's wife had tightly rubbed a metal plate adjacent to the stoves, left the newspaper over the stove and some pot on top of the newspaper. By removing the pot and then the newspaper, Chet noticed that some ink powders had passed from paper to metal and had remained semi-adhered in a way that looked like the negative of a photograph.

Most people would not have taken any notice, but in Chest's mind the newspaper lines remained longer than on the plate of the kitchen. For several days, the memory of the printed plate was struggling to light up a new concept of image transmission.

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Chet knew that he alone would not be capable of turning that idea into a patentable process because one half was missing: How could the image of the plate return to the paper? To answer this question the scene is entered by another emigrant, almost newly arrived in Nueva York, a German named Otto Kornei who was fleeing Nazi persecution. Chet could not leave work, but Otto had nothing to do. With Chet's money they set out to look for a cheap room with enough light, water, and gas, so that it could function as a laboratory. They finally found one in Astoria, Long Island, above a bar. Otto would work there, on Chet's pay.

It is known that it was precisely the twenty-second day of October 1938, when Otto called Chet to show him his achievement. Otto had procured one plate of zinc coated with sulphur. He took a glass, like those used under a microscope, and wrote with ink on the crystal: 10-22-38 ASTORIA. Then rubbed hard the zinc plate, turned off the light, and closed the windows. Afterwards, he applied a strong beam of light, using a fluorescent lamp. The windows were reopened, the glass removed, and Otto sprinkled lycopod powder on the plate. Both men waited a couple of seconds and blew on the plate, the dust disappeared, and one could read clearly: 10-22-38 ASTORIA. Finally, Otto pulled out of a drawer a sheet of paper impregnated with a thin layer of wax. He placed it on the zinc plate and, with a simple iron, applied heat. The paper retained the date. Otto and Chet hugged and went down to the bar to celebrate.

For the next six months Otto devoted himself to building a prototype that served to demonstrate the invention to potential investors. But nobody was interested.

World War II began, Chet fired Otto and patented the process in his name. Four years passed. Chet continued visiting companies without convincing any.

Now, back in 1925, the owner of a major Ohio steel mill, in an unfortunate appendicitis operation, had lost his life. When the will of Gordon Batelle was opened, he had donated a large amount of money to fund a laboratory with the aim of assisting penniless inventors. Chet made the trip from New York to Ohio and this time he managed to be heard.

There is a city north of New York where the largest part of the population worked in those years for only one company, which was dedicated to photography. The few who didn't, were suppliers, or they were related in some other way. In 1947 Chet thought it might attract the attention of the Rochester company. It didn't. But the news came to the knowledge of a firm, which was on the verge of bankruptcy and decided to bet its last resources to the new process.

At first, they thought about making a camera that eliminated the need for filmed paper. This first product had the disadvantage that it only served to photograph very flat and static objects. This limitation made it almost useless. Somebody thought that the only object with two dimensions instead of three, was paper, and that the machine could be better used to copy documents. That idea completely changed the design of the product. Instead of a bulky and motley-looking device, resembling a photographic studio, a compact console was the answer.

It took five more years to present the result of the transformation. Almost all the employees got rich. Not so much

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from the salaries they received as for systematically buying the shares that were being issued in each capital increase. So much money rained down on them that many were able to dedicate themselves to creating their own businesses in diverse activities, some as different as my friend Elmer Humes' school of models for haute couture. As of 1960, in that city of New York, the inhabitants did not work just for one company but for two: the old one: Kodak, and the new one: Xerox.

People from Europe and Asia were attracted by the smell of money, which filled the new entrepreneurs with no little pride. Foreigners were able to verify that Chet's patent was secured with seven seals and that for at least the next 20 years there was no other option but to agree with its holders.

When I got to Contentment Island there were only four years left before the ominous deadline. Part of my job consisted of estimating business forecasts for the next seven years. I was faced with a typical Ouspensky crossroads enigma. I made up mathematical models that required the use of IBM computers, installed in airconditioned rooms. To advance the results and not be surprised by my own electronic musings, I made use Ballard's cylindrical ruler and the adder with its metal spike.

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The company building began to look insignificant and a bit ridiculous

Chapter IX

Apart from the president, Archibald, whose main concern was making right decisions, three people dominated the thinking of the company. From a technical point of view, the admonitions prevailed of a most intelligent Slovak Jew named Paul Strassman, who was elucubrating on the technological future of communications in the business world. According to Paul S. the paper had its days numbered. We were headed for a Paperless Society. To emphasize his prophecies, he received people in an

office without a desk; only a primitive personal computer and several chairs.

Paul S. advocated the purchase of companies with interesting patents. He convinced the President to invest significant sums in magnificent laboratories in California, which he deemed an ideal place to be au courant of the latest trends. Several discoveries famous all over the world, such as the fax, the personal computer and its mouse went through those laboratories or were acquired, even if Xerox was not clever enough then take advantage, letting the chances slip away.

The main business remained that of copiers. In that realm, the person who had the last word was an executive with experience in the multicopy industry and whose major interest seemed to be to appropriate that market, convinced as he was of the inevitability of substitution. A theory, by the way, a bit limited, according to which, for example, the maximum possible number of automobiles would be defined by the statistical universe of horse carriages. This person name was Bill Souders, his wife's: Barbara, and both were very kind and considerate.

Finally, on the financial side, the opinions prevailed of a reserved and ambitious young man who had been viceroy of Xerox in Europe and would return to Connecticut with several medals for excellent economic performance. His name: Paul Allaire and his forte: the ability to deal with external financial analysts. Behind closed doors, Allaire opposed any attempt to reduce prices.

The truth is that I did not agree with any of the three main corporate intelligence gurus. I didn't believe in the Paperless Society of Strassman, neither in the substitution effect of

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Souders, and I was against the immutability of prices that Allaire defended, myself convinced that demand for copies was very elastic, that our prices were ridiculously high and that, by restricting the business, they made it vulnerable in the long term.

My first international appointment had been, precisely, Controller of pricing policy, but I didn't take possession of it, because Allaire changed it for another one, more important perhaps, but less risky from his point of view. I was entrusted with the introduction of new products and the management of the technical service in Europe. Two responsibilities only slightly related and temporarily compounded to make the job seem more attractive. The technical side did not interest me much, but the launch of new products gave me the opportunity to insist on the traceability of machines, and the importance of offering a product catalogue without loopholes for competition, a complete array of products in terms of performance, contract conditions and prices.

I spent two years in London, until Joe Flavin, president of the international business of Xerox, invited me to be part of its reduced team of collaborators in Connecticut. When I arrived in the United States, I noticed that Xerox was envious of IBM, whose style and manners were an example to imitate whenever the opportunity arose. The hypnotism was obvious and even funny. Hence the interest in hiring executives, like Flavin, from the admired company.

Joe Flavin had the ability of making himself appreciated personally without him giving up an iota in his business objectives. His tenacity in getting his subordinates to convince him of what he wanted to convince them, was curious. Eventually, Joe became disappointed with my lack of aggressiveness, and with Xerox itself. He was the first vice-

president who decided to leave the Company, fearing an uncertain future. Instead, he accepted the challenge of resurrecting Singer, the well-known sewing machine name. (He did manage to convert it into a successful Aerospatiale concern). After Flavin's departure, the international division of Xerox was cancelled, and global planning was entrusted to another ex-IBM director: Donald Pendery.

Pendery, too, had ideas differing from the rampant accommodative thinking, although he did not show much interest in defending them, except in inconsequential conversations. He advised me that the optimal way to manage oneself working for multinational companies is not much different from the one that brings success to members of a religious order. It was with this axioma in mind that he had recommended conclusions to be presented before their reasoning: *sentence first, verdict afterwards* as the Queen shouted in Carroll's Alice book. (Such were the deaf ears to the warnings of Cassandra when she tried to predict the Trojan tragedy, I mentioned).

Thus, a good two more years went by in what one might describe as happy continuity. That way of acting disregarded the discontinuous fact of the loss of the monopoly, which threatened, as clouds do, the pleasant heat in spring. It was written that it would happen within a time frame that already affected the strategic plans, but no one seemed to want to notice. I waited in vain for some sign that would allow me to address thoroughly this issue. On board, the orchestra continued to play, and the ship did not correct its course towards the route of the icebergs.

I looked for some light in the theories of Paul Strassman, and his Paperless Society. What could be made, out of that? Instinctively I started to blame others. After all, I was only

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responsible at second level, since the ultimate responsibility lay in my boss, Don Pendery.

But all was to no avail. I mistrusted Xerox devotion to rental versus sale. It only had good logic so long as the patent was in force. If someone invented a machine to make pearls like oysters do, but out of rice grains, he would do well to sell the pearls instead of the machine. But, when the patent expired, the value of those pearls would decline at the rate of machine production. The same with copies.

On my sleepless nights, another reason came to mind, less obvious, which explained Xerox's predilection for rental. The copying machines, all manufactured in Rochester and England, were too expensive. Ironically, the higher the manufacturing costs the more the company's assets increased its value. Ergo, when the patent expired the predilection for rental would be questionable and the unsuitability of the Rochester and Mitcheldean factories to compete on cost, would be exposed like rocks at low tide.

This reality appeared more evident to external financial analysts than to company executives. Stocks began to decline worryingly and then almost plummeted. Quite a few veterans of Chet's time stopped being millionaires by not daring to part with them in time and some started to depend solely on their salaries.

Seen with the perspective of the years, one can understand what happened. The Board of directors were powerless in the face of the enormity of vested interests. On the one hand, there was the magnificent concentration of talent in California, made up of young scientists who despised intensely all multinationals, including Xerox itself. They thought of solutions to people's

problems whereas in New England it was believed that they were generating products for Xerox. The psychological distance was equal to the geographical distance between Palo Alto and Connecticut.

The second core of vested interests were the Monroe County factories, politically tied to the Unions and New York politicians. The ability of the Rochester businessmen and the brilliance of their performance since the end of the Second World War, made them allergic to self-criticism.

And the third group resisting change was the excellent salesmen organization, a formidable chivalry knighthood, whose merits were magnified by the friendly glass of monopoly. If personal products were to become strategically important, the sales force would have to settle for a lesser and decadent role.

I was in these musings, living comfortably in the Smith House, when the mysterious object, placed on the mantelpiece by Meier, thought it was due time to speak out. The questions he asked were simple: 'Why are you here?' 'Shouldn't you express your views more strongly, regardless of the consequences?' After this reprimand of Meier's oracle, my inner peace was disturbed. From perplexity and criticism, I went on to host a feeling of guilt. I tried to excuse myself, retorting: 'But how?'

There was no answer.



The geese bathing and the glass reflecting the white table

Chapter X

The days following my discovery of the keel there fell a lot of rain. And when it stopped raining, the wind took the place of the rain in a clear attempt to deter me. They didn't succeed. Every time that I was entering the garage, I could not avoid seeing the keel, an extremely disturbing vision, which had the garage as an unsympathetic witness.

Eventually, the elements stopped getting in the way of the metaphorical link between the Smith House and the jetty, and, a Saturday morning, with the keel between arm and hip, I went down to face the sailboat for the second time.

It was easy to see where it was to be placed: just in the middle. It fit perfectly. So, time go back to the garage, take the pole with the sail, and continue with the preparations, in confidence. A detail may give an idea of the magnitude of my poise: after having rigged the ship with so much parsimony, I went up to the kitchen and in a plastic box I inserted two sandwiches, which were prepared the night before and, together with two cans of beer, they were deposited in a corner of the ship. Before I left, I looked everywhere to make sure there was no one in sight (especially the maritime police, so attentive) who could witness my movements. There wasn't.

Repeating the movements of the previous time, the boat should get going, I thought. And I thought rightly. A feeling of well-being invaded me when I saw how easily she moved. She pointed to an unknown, but constant, direction. As a small matter of concern, two tiny islets appeared to me as objects to avoid, although I did nothing to interfere in the intentions of the boat. After seconds of lack of initiative on my part, I thought I could give my opinion on the heading to follow and moved the tiller slightly to one side.

My manoeuvre took effect and the ship seemed to obey without reluctance. This encouraged me to insist on changing course, but this time the ship refused. The sail was stirred in the face of this conflict of opinions and ended up taking sides with the ship. We stood still. It seemed as if their bad mood could last forever, which condemned me to a second rescue by the sea

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police, but the tantrum passed and boat and sail agreed to continue course so long as I did not try to interfere.

So, we moved away, I couldn't say for how long. I remember that seeing the Smith House getting smaller made me afraid of not knowing how to come back. My glimpses of piloting with the tiller produced the same painful result: obedience and more speed at the beginning and fragrant negative to follow the order, immediately afterwards. The boat behaved like some donkeys, which for some reason have aversion to a place and no one can make them pass by. They cast their legs forward and nothing will do but to resign oneself.

We were motionless again, but further. The Smith House in the distance appeared as a very desirable place for more reasons than usual. My instinct told me that, if I kept holding the sail, nothing was going to change substantially, so I decided to let go and wait for events. I thought about the little box with the sandwiches and beers, key pieces of a frugal meal, and prepared to instil in my surroundings some a sense of normality, at least during my lunch.

It wasn't necessary, because as I made a move to pick up the bag, I had the perception that the ship was turning around. Forget the sandwiches and beer. Wait and watch. Without the slide rule, by simple eye perception, I could venture that, if things were to continue like this, the boat would have turned 180 degrees all by herself. Ships have their logic, different from ours; it's a matter of getting used to it. I started getting used to it at that time, waiting for her to turn around completely. And when the Smith House was in front of the bow, like a deer in the sight of a rifle, I retook the line, let the sail push, grabbed the tiller, and looked up expecting a little bit of complicity. The sailboat leaned to leeward

and very slowly began the way back home, while, holding my breath, I couldn't help a nervous smile, which I tried to hide, to avoid any misunderstanding.

In the same manner that pilots perceive the runway dimensions increasingly coincident those who are on land, so the house was regaining its usual size by the minute. The two small islands we passed on the left side and the boat entered the little cove. Why mess it all up by trying a docking of fortune on the jetty? Better to let the ship continue towards the middle of the beach, release the sail line a little earlier and prepare for the long-awaited blow against the sand.

Safe and sound, I had sailed out and back by my own means, and now I only had to push the boat a bit against the water, take it from the reins to its usual place, lying it well tied, wind the sail around the little mast, pick up my box of sandwiches and my beers, and go up to the Smith House to eat calmly.

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Marj on the original sofa chosen by Meier, now replaced

Chapter XI

I had to tell someone about my (second) sea baptism, and that someone was my friend Marj, who lived in the village of Mystic. The name fits the place well, but it doesn't really have anything to do with mysticism. It's an Indian name and, as I plan to talk about the Indians in another chapter, here I return to Marj. It was difficult for Marj to show enthusiasm for anything. On the

phone, she congratulated me for the boat ride and asked when I might drive thereover. I suggested that maybe she might like to go sailing around the wide blue sea, and share with me some sandwiches and a few beers, with the promise that she could return to land. Marj changed the subject.

Marj full name was Marjorie Sheppard. I had met her in London, after my wife's escape to Copenhagen, and, as a reserve of possible affection, kept her Connecticut address. Mystik was once a fishing village of whale hunters and cod fishermen. It is a beautiful place.

Watching Marj, it was hard to imagine that she could have any problems. She didn't. But she thought to have many. Problems are subjective things, certainly. I thought she might be interested in the Ouspensky's novel, but in the end I opted for not giving her the book, considering the pessimism that its pages distil.

Since Marj didn't show much interest, I told what had happened with the boat to Thérèse, my secretary, who listened with the attention she always paid and with eagerness to know what she was supposed to do. In this case she realized that nothing, except, perhaps, show a glimpse, a brief flash, of admiration. She suggested that I could benefit with further training, a statement which I did not deny completely, but put forward my inclination to learn by myself. Then she gave me the name of a bookstore in Westport where I could find a manual with tips for Beginners.

Thérèse was very clever and insightful. She let a few days pass before asking if I had found any interesting books. I had, but the book was too technical and complicated everything a lot, in

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my opinion. Thus, Thérèse told me about Beate Jensen, who also worked at the company and was a friend of hers. Beate Jensen was obviously of Nordic origin, and, as almost all Swedes do, she knew how to sail. Thérèse's idea was that Beate went to the Smith House with a sailboat that she could carry on top of her Volvo, station wagon.

The Volvo ingredient was determinant, and so we agreed to try this alternative to books. Beate came with all the necessary sailing instruments. She was taller than me, and between the top and bottom pieces of her swimsuit there was a torso long and slender, of the kind drawn up in fashion magazines which one believes impossible.

We two lowered the sailboat from the car, and carried it above our heads, as Indians do with their canoes, until we put it on the sand of the beach. Later we went back to the car, to pick the mast, its sail, and, of course, the keel.

Beate J. had a lot of patience and an easy smile. She resolutely got into the water dragging the sailboat, which she called 'laser', behind her. She sat on top of it, first sideways, and afterwards facing the bow, with legs raised forming a kind of inverted letter N in which one tip was her head and the other her feet. She inserted the keel when there was enough depth and rushed away like lightning. I waived back to her, breathed deeply, holding both sides of my head with my hands. Her demonstration discouraged me completely.

Three hours later, poor Beate was exhausted, sitting on the same rock as I did before, waving back to me. I, on the other hand, was exultant. The laser obeyed my orders like a tame

horse, and I repeated over and over the *coming about* manoeuvre to show Beate how well I managed.

At the jetty, the Smith's sailboat tried to ignore our unusual activity. I feared that deep inside she might be scheming something unamicable, something that should be avoided. I ended my lessons with a chaste kiss on my teacher's forehead, and immediately told her to wait while I went up to the house for provisions. The idea was to reassure the Smiths' sailboat with Beate at her helm, forgetting the laser on the sand, and sailing along, while I uncorked the bottle and offered some sandwiches and wine. The same sandwiches and the same wine that Marj had not been keen to accept.

When we were already far from the Smith House there appeared near us the boat of the maritime police, and the two agents saluted attentively. I felt somewhat alluded by their excessive greetings, but Beate reassured me by saying that, in the sea, people tend to salute a lot and that those who do not respond with courtesy are not real sailors.

The next Monday T  r  se already knew everything and was proud of the results. Rereading the book which I bought following her advice, some things were starting to make sense, while other remained unintelligible. The hardest thing to understand was why sails move boats. Since the book was written for people in a hurry and little knowledge of aerodynamics, I was left with an explanation I've never heard again and, well, I don't know if it has any foundation.

The book said something like this: 'Hold a semi used bar of soap in one hand. Introduce it in water and then press it between your palm and fingers. Both forces will oppress the poor

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bar, without letting it go... until it slips where it is least expected. Whether it does to one side or the other, will depend on the shape of the tablet. The same happens with boats: when the sail suffers pressure on both sides, the sail does not know how to react and ends up pushing the ship towards a point which may be almost contrary to the wind's direction.

Anyway, the useful thing was not to know the why, but the how. There's something about the ship's movement by action of the sails that reminds the flight of birds or angels. Maybe it's the silence, or the hiss of the air or the sound of the waves resembling a beating of wings. Unlike the push from behind produced by propellers, the impulse of the sails comes from above, it comes from the air and takes the ship as would Polyphemus with his rough fingers play with a leaf to make it move in the water.

Such were my thoughts, when weeks later I ventured to reach the banks of the Saugatuk River, with the help of the Long Island Coastal Guidebook, because its waters are shallow, and it is advisable to know the meaning and location of the buoys. To get to Saugatuk you pass on the port side the village of Rowayton, with restaurants offering crabs and lobsters. Sailing along the Saugatuk River, I discovered a pier which went deep into the water and ended up in a kind of pyramidal roof shed, with railings on each side to watch the boats go by, and a ladder of about twelve steps to communicate sea and land.

In the guide, the site was marked as *Pier Way landing* and it seemed to me that I was causing no harm to anyone by docking in front of the ladder and going up to the booth. That way I put a certain purpose to the crossing and could say to myself on the way back: 'I've gone to Pier Way Landing'

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Little could I imagine that, after living in the Smith House, my next shelter would be the Van Rensselaer House, with its landing to go sailing and return saying: 'I have gone up to the Smith House'



She didn't ask for anything

Chapter XII

The idea of sending three airline tickets was of no use. On the first visit to my children, I was able to find out that their mother had exchanged the tickets for money, to contribute to the expenses of the commune. Besides, she wouldn't let my sons visit me in America because her lawyer advised against, as the Law could make her unable to claim them, once in U.S. territory. So, I

was the one who came to see them in Denmark. I used to pick them up in the commune and take them for lunch in a restaurant, before entering the Copenhagen parks. I watched how they were growing, and I was impressed, above all, by the way Lars extended his protecting arms towards little David.

On those days, I very much wanted to talk to them about the Smith House. In the same way as Richard Meier had designed a slide for Dagny, it was clear to me that the rooms on the top floor of the Smith House belonged to them. But since I wasn't sure to be able to turn that dream into reality, I was happy with just enjoying their company and that, back to the commune, they could talk about how they had enjoyed the time spent with me.

During my journeys back to America I was immersed in thoughts about the origin of my misadventure, which I placed in a precise day, years before I even got to know their mother. A phone call to a certain Ursuline person had disturbed my inner peace for years. 'Sorry to tell you that I am getting married', that's what she answered. Until that moment, I had held the conviction that my life would make a lot of sense if the one who married her was to be me and, on the contrary, it would be an error of Nature if she preferred another.

After seven years of that dire warning, was my life a vacuous life? Not completely. Every event, good or bad, is chained to the next good or bad, so that, if one eliminates the bad ones, the good ones also disappear. As in the strange life of Ivan Osokin, without the elusiveness of the Ursuline, there would be no Lars, no David, nor I would be living in Smith House.

Yes... but.

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Inside, I sometimes was lost in thought, while looking at the strange piece that Meier had placed at the mantelpiece, perhaps intending to counterbalance so much whiteness around. It looked African, may be a souvenir of a trip. I considered it an object of worship, a representation of the seed, always impure, of Beauty. For me it was an oracle, like the Indian bronzes in the house of the Russian. 'All things can be made to return, but to no use', said the magician.

Return... I remembered my excitement when ascending in the elevator to the flat where she lived in 1952, ringing the doorbell and meeting her mother, me not knowing what to say. She smiled, gave me a small photo of her daughter, and gently accompanied me back to the door.

The three useless tickets offered curious similarities with that photograph. The oracle of the Smith House was less pessimistic than the Russian magician. 'All things can be made to return, and chance decides, sometimes in favour, sometimes against. But it is never the same'. His words alerted me. I had to go back to the turning point of my previous life and place myself there again, so that chance could find the opportunity to intervene.

Almost twenty years after the first time, I went back to that flat and saw her mother again. She told me that the marriage was not going well. I was given some news of her daughter, among them that she would attend a congress of pharmacists in Tel Aviv.

Back at Smith House, the oracle didn't seem alluded nor gave any signs of giving up. While some wood was consumed in a fatuous way under its base, I dared to insinuate that he was

wrong and Ouspensky was quite right: 'All things can be turned back, but to no use'. I insisted: 'In vain, devil, do you hear me'?

'Perhaps you ought to buy another ticket' was his reply.

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The plane landed in Tel Aviv and several soldiers entered the cabin who proceeded to ask for documents before authorizing to disembark. I asked the taxi driver to take me to a central hotel. The congress was in its third day. I found about the hotel where the Spaniards were staying, went to the place and struck up a conversation with the concierge. Indeed, she slept there, but she was absent all day. Apparently well accompanied by a professor from Tel Aviv University, who would pick her up and return her to the hotel in the evening.

In my hotel room I meditated on the futility of my impulses, every time I tried some form of proximity. There was the consolation of presenting myself in front of her, telling her the truth, and saying goodbye.

At breakfast, the next day, I appeared in the dining room of her hotel, and I told her bluntly why I was there. 'I am sorry, but today I am expecting a professor' 'Cannot you excuse yourself?' 'He is going to show me the city and I am invited to his house' 'I will go with you' 'Say I am your brother' Her gaze reminded me of her mother's twenty years earlier.

He was talking while driving a yellow Volkswagen Beetle; she was looking at everything outside the right window and I was behind them, leaning forward a little to see her in profile.

The professor's house was flat and extended, on the outskirts. It had a covered terrace at ground level, with a table

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and chairs where we were undoubtedly going to eat, protected by a handrail. His wife was in a bad mood, partly from having an unexpected guest and partly from having a guest unwanted. She got up to prepare things in the kitchen and a minute later I followed her. It was an instinctive act and we both felt that we had put a bit of acidity in the sweetness of the moment that the other two lived.

With the trade-offs made, lunch was enjoyable for everyone. The after-dinner, however, seemed like the third act of a comedy that was missing the fourth to know how it was going to end. The professor was supposed to return the two brothers to their hotel. But, to me, that ending was unacceptable, and, without thinking what I was doing, I suddenly got up looking at my watch and said in Spanish: 'We have to go'. The hosts turned to her, puzzled, looking for translation. I took her by the hand repeating: 'We have to go, come on, or we will be late!'

I don't remember how it happened. I was driving a rented car and she was looking at me with amusement. It all seemed very funny to her. She couldn't stop laughing at everything. I, who had started without seeing the comic side, began to feel caught in. 'Where are we going'? she asked, 'I don't know, perhaps to Lake Tiberias, where miracles happen'. Smile. 'Or to Mount Carmel, in the obscure night of the Soul'. Silence.

At the lake we met Spaniards from the Congress who were sightseeing, and we sneaked out of their reach...as we assumed that they would be missing her at the meetings. Later we noticed the group everywhere: in Jerusalem, in Haifa, in Jericho, in the Dead Sea and in Bethlehem. Seeing them so passive, while they listened, caused hilarity in us because we imagined that some were commenting on the strange disappearance of the pharmacist

favoured by the professor. In front of the Wailing Wall, I dared to write a suggestion for my future on a piece of paper. She didn't ask for anything.

Days later we were in Rome, in an apartment whose keys my friend from Rank Xerox, Luigi Pellegrini, had agreed to lend me, emulating Jack Lemon. It was raining heavily in the neighbouring Piazza del Popolo. '*Too much rain falling*' Carole King had anticipated in 1968. '*Non scordarti di me*' repeated Iva Zanicchi, on the way back from Israel. Had they been premonitions from the Smith House?

Meier's oracle watched me amused. 'How was it?' he asked, though he knew the answer. 'How was it?' I asked, timidly. The strange figure seemed to look up to the bedrooms. 'Are you coming back alone?'

I closed my eyes. The image of Lars, with his arm around his brother's shoulder, protecting him, got in the way and made the vision vanish.

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The Good Spirit of Contradiction, vigilant

Chapter XIII

Lying on the sand of the beach of the Smith House came to my mind the Indian name of the tiny island where I lived: Tokeneke. And then, like the grapes in one bunch, other names came up; they could be seen on road and turnpike signs, such as Mamaronek, Saugatuck, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Niantic, Narraganset, Mystik, Cockenoes, Naugatuck, Shippan...

Looking up at the sky of Tokeneke, it occurred to me that on the same spot, but three centuries earlier, and as horizontal as me, seeing the same rocks and waters, there could have been an Indian person, as peaceful and dreamy. A somewhat reddish-skinned Indian who perhaps belonged to the tribe of the Kinipiac or the Munsis. Maybe the same Tokeneke, who was the chief in this territory.

Little is known about him. It is even unclear why the Darien area of Connecticut was called Darien. We can tell only *who* chose the name: a certain Thaddeus Bell. Thaddeus made himself loved by his neighbours after achieving independence from Stamford in 1820. A league of grateful women proposed that the new municipality be called Bell. Out of modesty, he did not accept the honour and suggested instead the name Darien in memory of some pleasant experience he must have had in that part of the Isthmus of Panama. Since then, the official version is that the Darien name was chosen simply because it has a pleasant sound. It would have been fairer to let the whole district (and not only the islets) be called Tokeneke, if only by synecdoche.

Returning to the Indian person that I imagined on the beach of the Smith House, its presence there would be more likely in the hot season than in the cold winters of Konectucat. The Matabasic were migratory Indians, like my friends the geese, who came to the coast in summer and went into the forests when they snow made its appearance. They were not the only Indians in the country of the Long River (which is the meaning of the word Connecticut). They shared it with the Pequot, the Masachusetts, the Narragansett, the Mohicans and others. A tribe of the Matabasic nation, the Kinipiac, occupied the part of Konectucat closest to New York, without reaching Manhattan

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where another tribe was located and whose interesting name was the *Esopos*.

Primitive peoples are usually classified according to whether they are farmers or hunters. The Kinipiacs were farmers in summer and hunters in winter. As farmers they demonstrated an expertise of centuries. Not only did they till, but they also fertilized the land with fish residues.

They cultivated mostly corn, but also artichokes, beans, pumpkins, and tobacco. Women were expected to farm the land products, but for tobacco, which was reserved for men. To avoid the pain of weeding, they sowed the beans next to corn canes, so that they would grow together. They knew how to make bread out of corn and mixed their flour with hazelnuts. For dessert they had raspberries and blackberries.

In summer, their main course was fish, sometimes from river, like salmon, and others from the sea, like sea bass, because they knew how to make canoes of tree trunks and knew the use of nets. In winter they resorted to leghold traps as the easiest way of hunting, although they also used bows and arrows. The hunt consisted of deer, moose, rabbits, squirrels, raccoons, beavers, and otters. They dressed in the skins of what they hunted. They used leather also to divide room space and make more comfortable homes.

The houses of the Kinipiac were round. Their way to build them was to put some vertical stakes following the shape of a circle, and when the palisade was already formed, they fixed flexible logs on top of the walls and made them bend forming a vault by converging them at a central point. When the roof was well secured, they proceeded to trim a hollow at the highest

point. That gap served as a way out for the smoke from the fireplace in the kitchen, where meat was roasted.

In short, they had a quiet way of life and not without amusements and small luxuries. They knew copper and liked to adorn themselves. Their currency consisted of especially chosen seashells, whose value as a beauty accessory was much appreciated.

Before the arrival of the white man, the Indians of Konectucat only really feared the giant Mauschop. This terrifying figure was responsible for their misfortunes and diseases. Thank goodness, there was another giant, a friendly giant, whom they called Jobomock. All the good stuff came from Jobomock: it was he who had taught them the arts of fishing and farming utensils. In times of trouble, the Indians of Connecticut prayed for help to Jobomock, who could be pleased with the smoke from a kind of sacred tobacco.

While the Indian of Tokeneke in my imagination, was swimming with his parents in the same beach where I was, an English couple and their son were sailing for Holland, fleeing justice. Their descendants say that it was for having participated in the plot of the Marquess of Essex to bring down the Queen. But it is also possible that it was for having criticized, like so many Puritans, the corruption of the Church of England.

The father died in Holland and the son married a Dutch woman named Heylken, that is: Helen. When they arrived as emigrants to America in 1629, Helen still couldn't speak English. The husband, whose name was John, surnamed Underhill, found employment as a militia instructor, having learned rudiments of the military arts when he tried to enlist as a cadet in William of

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Orange's army, without succeeding. His job in New Amsterdam consisted of capturing runaway bandits or robbers. In return, he had the right to a home, they paid him his maintenance, and they let him call himself 'Militia captain'.

New England was then being occupied by English and Dutch settlers. Underhill felt half English half Dutch, which allowed him to betray one and the other, without betraying himself.

Around the same time, another English puritan, named Thomas Hooker, was tried in England for his intolerant sermons and called to testify in Court. Instead of honouring the appointment, he escaped to Rotterdam. In that port, he approached the frigate 'Griffin' and took a one-way ticket to America.

Hooker managed to establish himself as pastor of a parish in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. But his opinions made him incompatible with the regulations of the Colony. One of the most influential judges, John Cotton, took a stand against him. Frustrated, Thomas Hooker considered it prudent to retire to another area, not without bringing with him a group of faithful who appreciated his teachings and followed him in the quest for heavenly glory.

Thomas Hooker and his one hundred disciples founded the Connecticut Colony at a point on the map that they decided to call Hartford, a name requested by Samuel Stone, a fellow priest and neighbour of England's Hartford. One not small drawback for the newcomers was the presence of Indians, who believed they had the right to live in those lands.

That year of 1636 a merchant ship had had difficulties entering Long Island and when observing it from the coast, some Indians approached the ship and killed the entire crew. A punitive expedition left Hartford. They struck another tribe, the Pequots, that had nothing to do with the culprits, except to give them asylum. In retaliation, a party of Pequots attacked a white camp on the Connecticut River, killing six settlers and three women.

At this point in time, the figure of John Mason appears in History. He was another emigrant, who had arrived three years earlier from England. Like John Underhill, he was able to put his tactical knowledge to service before the congregants of the Colonies, who used him as recruiter of militiamen and leader in punishment operations.

In May 1637, the Hartford Assembly commissioned John Mason and John Underhill with the extermination of the Connecticut Indians. When the war seemed over, in Hartford, the Puritans sang thanksgiving hymns, but Underhill and Mason felt that, so long as Chief Sassacus was alive, the Indians could regroup and demand their rights again. Fleeing from their pursuers, the Pequots took refuge in the swampy lands of Sasco, where they were surrounded and eliminated, as a proud tombstone proclaims. The persecution ended in September 1638 with the edict of Hartford by which the surviving Indians were expelled from Connecticut and were to emigrate to other States in the term of one month.

After that historic moment, Connecticut became as white and Anglo-Saxon as the houses of Richard Meier.

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The landscape lived within the house

Chapter XIV

Three years of happiness, with a minus of bad conscience were needed before I decided to take the plunge.

Among the subsidiaries that came to present their plans to Stamford, one was Fuji Xerox, a joint company with the photography giant Fuji Photo. Fuji was part of the international group, complying with the requirement to follow the planning guidelines set by me, though, strictly speaking, they were doing it

out of courtesy, since Fuji owned more than 50 % of the shares. They were mainly interested in finding out what was going on in Stamford.

The team of executives that came each year to make the presentation was always headed by a young director, related to the main Japanese shareholders, named Tony (Yotaro) Kobayashi. Tony was affable, serious and spoke slowly. He kept an eye on the presentation and guessed my thoughts. May be because of that, I dared to ask him something a bit shocking. I said, 'Tony amigo, do you think you could find out the manufacturing plans of our impending competition (and here I mentioned their Japanese names) and mail them to me?' He said yes, the way the Japanese say yes, meaning only that they have understood your request.

Months went by and I didn't receive anything from Tony, forgotten request which I related to an understandable sign of patriotism. Thus, nothing happened until the following year, in which he appeared again in Stamford. Japanese executives, in general, fear be seen in fault or carelessness, so on that occasion Tony was kinder than ever, he led the presentation of the day with the four or five executives who accompanied him and, when finished, he approached me with a thick package. He handed it to me with a smile and added. 'Luis, this data they are public. You can make use as you please'

I thought that, since the information was public, it might not be that interesting, but I thanked him for the kindness of bringing them to me. Back in my office, I saw that the envelope contained many computer pages from the Ministry of Industry and Technology (the famous MITI) with profuse detail of the forecasts of each would be competitor companies, including projections in

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square meters of new plants. Logically, no quantities of product units produced were shown, but a relationship could be established between square meters and production volume, simply by using our own scales and percentages.

Those documents gave me the added strength that I needed to get out of my ostracism and respond, although belatedly, to the mute reproaches from the oracle. I don't quite remember how the scene was organized. In my mind stays the sunny morning when I saw myself in front of a rather large audience, summoned to hear something that I had to say. Among the attendees was William F. Souders, who then was chief operations officer, and whose preferences went for *big* machines, sold to *big* companies and in exchange for *big* money.

Quite the opposite of what he was going to hear from me. The presentation, as presentations go in multinational environments, meant an opportunity for the speaker, but also a risk. In my case, the only granted kindness went for the use of a language that was not mine and little else. From previous occasions, I was expected to mention economic concepts such as the elasticity of demand and the importance of costs of production, topics that in the ears of engineers and mathematicians meant a descent to areas where opinion and prejudice reigned. So, as not to fall into repetitions that had already been shown useless, I resorted to military terminology, as if I were talking to generals and people from an intelligence service. Despite the usual low light, with the illumination pouring from the screen I could see that the faces reflected a perceptible dose of astonishment.

I based my points on Tony Kobayashi's papers with the forecasts about the factories that were being built in Japan, showing on screen the seals of authenticity. I went from square meters to

estimates regarding the number of machines that would be manufactured in a month, a year, a five-year period and ahead. The negative impact on our markets was appreciated from the fifth year, onwards, during the following decade.

I then gave my opinion on how it would happen. The new machines would be installed in marginal places, choosing our most profitable customers. Those placements, seemingly innocuous, would be the virus that would slowly drain the foundation of our business. I suggested that the best strategy against a virus was to be vaccinated with that same virus, and I ended by saying that no major changes were needed. It was enough, I suggested, to take advantage of the Fuji Xerox connection, and manufacture in Japan. We ought to make sure that, when the competitors offered small, simple, reliable, and cheap xerographic products to our customers, such an option was already in our catalogue and on better terms.

Once again, I was unable to avoid the order of a syllogism: a) main proposition: the Japanese docs. b) secondary premise: the virus within our customers c) conclusion: need for a vaccine.

The proposal sounded far-fetched because the Japanese continued to be viewed with suspicion. Pearl Harbor wasn't completely forgotten. The eyes of some of the listeners turned to Bill Souders in a sly way, to know his reaction. Normally, Bill did not let his thoughts be known during a presentation. But this time he must have judged the matter serious enough for there to be no doubt about his position. While I was speaking, the sideways movements of his head were expressive enough.

I wasn't surprised or flinched by it, for I continued quietly until the end. It didn't take long because I didn't have much more to say.

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Unlike other presentations, when the lights were turned on, there was no chatter, trivial criticisms, greetings from unknown people, polite comments, and a few jokes. This one ended with serious faces and the attendees quick in disappearing and returning to their desks. On the way out I heard some people say something dismissive about the 'japs', in general.

The presentation had failed. Thereafter my reputation in the company was clouded with an anodyne sieve, which led to indifference and oblivion. I also remember, contrary to what might have been expected, that I felt liberated, because I had said what I believed in, and in the best possible way. À la Carole King: *'cause I'm doing the best I can'*.

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Some people wanted to see the house

Chapter XV

The couple of photos with female friends in these pages are intended to convince me that they were there, without any doubt. Photos from the Smith House can be seen aplenty in books and magazines, and it is easy to have access to videos, too. These are different. Marj is laying in Meier's white sofa and from the wall hung visible pieces of decoration selected by him. As for Barbara, she is smoking next to the fireplace, already lit.

I was not always in perfect condition in there. Once I walked into a pharmacy to buy something to cure a cold. Lined up in a corner there was a bookshelf with small flasks in many colours like those used to contain jams. As I got closer to the sampler, I could tell that each colour had its reason for being, because they were vitamins and not all the same. From one end of the highest ledge hung a booklet that explained the advantages of each pill. I read it with great attention because, except one, all the others were manufactured thinking of me. Only the flask to improve the optical function seemed unnecessary. Bones, skin, nerves, blood, nails, fat, hair, muscle strength, and other attributes... every part of my body could be improved.

I congratulated myself on the luck of having found that arsenal and I bought all the jars. It was difficult to establish the order of consumption. All seemed the same interesting to me, especially the one that affected the permanence of hair. Unable to decide a sequence, I chose to swallow all of them in one gulp.

It was very counterproductive. I was in bed for a couple of days. It was not possible to find a suitable name for such an ailment without having to explain my mistake to Thérèse over the phone. So, I had no choice but to tell the truth. What is curious is that I didn't call anyone to give me company. I recovered all by myself in that beautiful house, which could perhaps be an indication that I had not completely lost hope of seeing the ungrateful Lene, one day, sitting on the white sofa.

Time went by and nothing like that occurred. Five or six months after my arrival at the Smith House I got a phone call from Frederick Smith, my landlord. After asking how I was doing, he requested me to receive some clients of Richard Meier, who wanted to see the house and might phone to me that same

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day. The idea of participating, although indirectly, in the business of Meier & Partners encouraged me to prepare well for the visit, thinking about what I was going to say when showing each room and corner of the building, without forgetting the humble garage.

I expected a couple with or without some children. At the scheduled time, a car arrived with four men dressed in dark and looking like tax inspectors or something even more intimidating. They were Olivetti executives. No great talkers. Would they be looking for a home for some company director? I thought that, as they didn't ask questions, it would be better to let them prowl and wait for them to leave. Before saying goodbye and to break the ice a little I asked them if Olivetti had in mind any electronic calculators. I must have hit the nail on the head because their faces relaxed considerably, and I was told that they had indeed already launched one in Italy and that soon there were more to come.

I forgot that visit until I learned that Meier had designed a dormitory building for students of an Olivetti Training Centre in New York. It seemed to me that Olivetti, being an Italian company, gave more importance to artistic design than was commonly practiced by corporate investment at the time. Its training centre in Europe was entrusted to the well-known English architect James Stirling. Both Stirling and Meier are Pritzker Architecture Laureates.

I think Meier influenced the way multinationals shelter their managers by initiating an era of buildings of great merit. In many respects, the contribution of Business to the progress of Architecture, both in design and materials, has something in common with the historical impulse behind the erection of mosques, monasteries, and cathedrals. Predictably, the authors of

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palaces and museums were sponsored by kings, popes, and nobles.

What, in my opinion, distinguishes the architect of New Jersey from his contemporaries, is the circumstance that his most perfect work, the one that gave him fame and defined a style imitated a thousand times, is not an office, museum, or palace of oligarchs, but the humble and solitary house with four bedrooms, and one and a half bathroom, in Contentment Island. His first and definitive work of art.

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He walked out never to return, not even to pick up his belongings

Chapter XVI

After the episode of chapter XIV, someone might come up with the question of how Xerox went on, and what about each of the characters mentioned. Say, the company continued with its aristocratic strategy, disdaining products for individual use, and keeping outside the spectacular development of domestic computerization. It continued to manufacture in the United States, England, and Holland until a few years ago, when deigned

to start producing in China, if only its printing consumables. To counter the high R&D costs, austerity measures were imposed in the international organization. As could be anticipated, not only was the unnecessary ship cargo lightened, but in some ports the best of seafaring sailors abandoned. The California factory of ideas continued to provide sensational inventions, such as laser printing, the 'windows' concept, which gave rise to Word, the mouse in computers and many other, but communication between the two coasts continued being a dialogue of the deaf, in which the winners were the researchers, who, once the technologies had been developed thanks to the copious funds of Xerox, they migrated to other companies more awake and agile.

The Japanese sold many more machines than I had predicted in that brave presentation, yet the policy of expensive products for use in large spaces, advocated by Bill Souders, remained unaltered. The Paperless Society prophesied by Paul Strassman since 1965, arrived in 1984, married the Paper Society and both passed by the doors ajar of the Xerox corporation, then immersed in its own contradictions.

As for people: Paul Strassman influenced Xerox to invest millions in acquiring the company with the most powerful computers in the world. After a short time, it had to be sold at a much lower price. Divergences with other managers led him to ask for early retirement. He wrote a book recounting his experiences in the company, where he describes, almost as a spectator, decisions in which he had a not-so-passive role. (Today he is a successful author, among whose books the most related to these events is *'The Computers nobody wanted. My years at Xerox (2009)'* but I recommend also the two autobiographical volumes wherein he narrates his odyssey to

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escape the Nazi clutches in Slovakia, just before Second World War).

Bill Souders, who might have hoped to become Xerox chairman, left in retirement, and became the president of Emery, a freight transport company.

Archie Mccardell, when finally convinced that the best years for Xerox were over, left, attracted by a superlative salary, as president of a truck company that was in trouble because of (guess what!) high production costs. Archie imposed unpopular corrective measures and the employees went on strike at the call of their Unions. The struggle that followed lasted many months, until the damage was so excessive that the company ceased to exist.

Paul Allaire managed to survive several reorganizations, contemplated the departure of some directors, to finally take full control of Xerox. As president, he was unable to stop the decline, although he managed to delay it as much as possible. In trying to convince financial analysts that the situation was not so serious as they thought, he admitted some accounting practices that were questioned by the S.E.C. Agreements in Court hallways resulted in terrific fines or else, which the Board agreed to finance, to the peace of mind of Paul and five other board members.

Tony Kobayashi assumed the general management of Fuji Xerox, a promotion that many of us had taken for granted.

I have left Donald Pendery purposely for last because his end meets naturally with the finale of this little book.

Every year, Don and Joyce wished me happy Christmas with a letter instead of a card, even after I returned to Europe. In those letters they informed me of how things were going in

Stamford, of Joyce's activities at the University and of the pleasantness of their travels to Paris and Florence. I keep one in which Don appreciated, unrelated to other events, my past behaviour and way of managing the planning job.

But in 1983 I stopped hearing from them. I had left America convinced that Pendery wasn't going to defend the ideas we had exchanged, him knowing that they were not appreciated. His acquiescence had not been accompanied by a strong support before Xerox's top management. Back in Spain I imagined him walking peacefully towards a generous retirement in the friendly land of Connecticut. Therefore, my astonishment was great, when, reading the book by Paul Strassman *'The Computer Nobody wanted'* I came across the following paragraph, on page 134:

Donald Pendery, the VP of Corporate Planning, was a thoughtful but dour New Englander who did not tolerate much of the nonsense that increasingly dominated corporate conversations. I admired him a great deal.

By 1982 he diverted his attention from the Office of the Future because it was now a lost cause. He saw how Xerox was haemorrhaging cash and rapidly losing market position in the heartland copier business. He started advocating a major shift of resources from losses in the Information Systems Group to the languishing copier business.

It was in 1983 when I had lunch with Pendery. He had just returned from a meeting with David Kearns, now the CEO. Pendery's verdict was that Kearns was a wonderful person but with the short-term outlook of an IBM Branch Manager. Apparently, Kearns advocated superior execution and

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improved quality of marketing programs while Pendery was pleading to fix what was now a slowly sinking ship.

Shortly thereafter Pendery went to see Kearns to restate his case again. I do not know what happened, but Pendery resigned on the spot. He did not even return to his office but walked out of the HQ building never to return even to pick up his belongings. Shortly thereafter died under unusual circumstances.

Under unusual circumstances...When I think of the Russian fatalism of the book that 'Esmeralda' left with me, I feel sorry that I couldn't be with Don on the day of his *non sequitur*. I would have come to his house, and something would have turned up in my mind. Possibly I would have suggested to make a visit together to Caramoor and, on the way back, we would have talked about Architecture. Together with Joyce at his home I might have proposed to them to move to a Meier designed house and forget about Xerox. And if none of that gave comfort to them, I would have mentioned Italy, where 'they would always have Florence'.

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The pier of number 12 at Pier Way Landing

Epilogue

Frederick and Carole Smith's marriage broke down too soon, in my opinion. It should have continued at least one year more, or two, or three. But so is life, and one afternoon I got a call from Carole with the news that they had separated and that she kept the Darien's house. I met her new companion, who was kind and understanding in saying they could wait, but Carole had

everything decided already and wanted to return as soon as possible. I knew they were going to expand the house so that instead of a summer residence it would be able to accommodate a full family, with children from both sides.

So, back to the Holiday Inn. My English friends Jack and Liz Thomas considered my new situation, and I was offered the gardener's house in the residence they had rented from Bette Davis. This allowed me to look for a new one comfortably and enjoy the affection of my hosts, though I was aware that it would decrease a little each day.

In matters of rehousing, the assistance from the Company was a good option. I asked them to contact my Lady of the Dwellings, who already knew of my phobias and philiias. When we saw each other again, she had overcome her bad mood of two years ago. She asked me if I still wanted a 'contemporary house' rather than the usual 'colonial' type. I told her that I would love the closest thing to the Smith House...possible.

She took three or four days, or maybe more, and finally appeared at number 1 Crooked Road, Bette Davis's home. She arrived in the same station wagon she drove the night of Contentment Island. It was six o'clock in the afternoon. She didn't show me any photographs, because, she said, this time she was sure I was going to like the house. During the drive, it looked like we were going back to Darien, but a little earlier she turned left, following the bank of the river that the Indians named Saugatuck. A final twist of the road with a couple of curves and we arrived a house looking like a huge wooden box, the size of six aligned trees. It was number 12 of Pier Way Landing, a place I knew from my short sea voyages.

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Waiting for us inside, was the Van Rensselaer couple, who reminded me of the Smith. The owner waved in his hand the same sort of drink. During the courtesy conversation, John V.R. spoke excitedly about his interests in a business of special tomatoes. They were tomatoes that were not in contact with the earth but hung from walls of a building and were fed only with water. Judging by the house, I imagined that he might also have some other business. After this prolegomenon, he showed me the rooms and I admit that, in some way, the interior looked like the Smith House, though outside, instead of white, their house was (almost) black.

The lady in charge, convinced of the similarities, had already advanced my acceptance to the owners. We were all pleased not to have lost the time. I was invited out to the terrace. The waters of Long Island were just in front of us. And something else that made me turn my eyes to John Van Rensselaer. I asked, pointing to a marine kiosk in the background of a long passageway: 'Is it part of the house?'

'Naturally' he answered, smiling. 'Do you like sailing?'

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